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FACE WORK AND SOCIAL MEDIA



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LIT

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Introduction: Face Work and Social Media

The opportunities for social networking offered by numerous online platforms were one of the reasons for the dramatic rise in the use of the internet in private households in the mid-1990s. In addition to simple possibilities of making contact with others via email or chat rooms, another very popular means of communication in the early days was newsgroups – platforms in which users can exchange information and ideas on common interests. This was a first step to a globalised culture of virtual communication that has since then become part of everyday life. Around the turn of the century, the term *Web 2.0* was introduced (cf. inter alia Runkehl 2012) – a reference to the fact that a technical transformation had taken place from relatively static websites to interactive platforms that can be edited and developed by the users themselves without specialist knowledge. On many of these platforms, the focus is on social interaction between the users, which has resulted in the establishment of a further term: *Social Media*.

The use of these two terms side by side does not make clear exactly what they stand for and how they can be distinguished from one another. They are often used synonymously. However, this

leads to the misunderstanding that online media have been social only since the introduction of simplified interaction possibilities, or that only an extended possibility of participation by the users constituted a social medium. For that reason, in this volume we would like to make a clear distinction between the two terms. In our view, Social Media include all online platforms that focus on interaction between the users – regardless of the technical conditions. This also means that we consider online forums, which are not included under the term Web 2.0, as Social Media, as well as the comments function of online newspapers – but not the online newspapers themselves. Social Media also, of course, include social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, which are mainly used for maintaining personal contacts and for exchanging information. Similarly, platforms for the exchange of media contents and discussion relating to them, such as YouTube, Instagram and Pinterest, are, in our view, also covered by the term Social Media.

A key feature of Social Media is the self-presentation of the participants. As a rule, they create a user profile in which they reveal information about themselves in as much or as little detail as they like. However, other users develop a perception of their identity not only on the basis of their profile but also on every individual contribution, every shared piece of content and every comment on contributions and contents provided by other users. It becomes clear that mutual perception plays a significant role in Social Media. We believe that the distinction between online and offline worlds that is still frequently made even today – often also under the labels “virtual world” and “real world” – is not justified, as online interactions are part of real life. This in turn means that users do not usually act as a blank page on online platforms but bring experiences, feelings and their identity with them. Although they can freely decide to a large extent how they want to present themselves to their communication partners as long as they do not

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encounter them in the street, it is nevertheless hardly possible to separate themselves completely from the experiences they have gained in socialisation. Consequently, it is hardly surprising that concepts such as *face* and *identity* are also closely linked online, and users exhibit similar face-related patterns of action as are familiar from other communication situations. For example, they react sensitively to threats against their own face, and the virtuality of the communication space has often little or no mitigating influence on their feeling of having been attacked. Users also accept appreciation in Social Media as *face work* relating to a real part of their identity. Nevertheless, some contradictions initially remain when face theories are transferred to Social Media, and these require a more intensive theoretical examination.

The link between face work and Social Media, which is the focus of this volume, leads to a dialectic field of study, which represents complex challenges for sociopragmatic research. Paradoxically, it is a matter of searching for face or faces in the different communication forms that are characterised as *faceless* and *bodiless* media (cf. Herring 2001: 613). In spite of the anonymity and virtuality provided by technology, Social Media are fundamentally platforms for social encounters. Their elementary function is, therefore, the construction of social presence(s) (cf. Bays 1998), i.e. they generate exclusively a textually performed sociality. In the form of a virtual marketplace, structures, modalities and procedures of everyday interaction are reproduced on the screen in such a way that they literally “embody” social being and social relations in the ongoing communication. Social Media draw their self-conception by reflecting and retracing personality simultaneously on two levels: on the interpersonal level of the mutual exchange in a *community of practice*, and on the demonstrative level of a public communication and its perception by a broad unknown user audience. Even though additional codes have been introduced, enriching the

moves with visual hints to emotions and mood, language still plays the most important role. In these fundamentally text-based forms of communication, identities are implied in the typed written expression. It is often even the case that the typeface re-creates outlines of certain social features, re-constructs projected self-images, lays trails to the acting subject and provides hints at typical characteristics. We, thus, can assume that, in Social Media, faces are communicated fundamentally through language, i.e. that all linguistic strategies of the user involved are essentially face work and, therefore, make visible the “verbal face of face” that is, on the one hand, unconsciously imported into every social encounter, but, on the other hand, consciously enacted and manipulated whenever potential conflict situations are on.

The difficulty now lies in making face work empirically tangible. The fact that communicative conflicts are generally prevented or defused for social reasons, turns out to be the key area for socio-pragmatic theories, viz. what is understood as face work should possibly be identified in conflict-aware speech acts. The term face work is, therefore, a theoretical bridge that enables analysts to reach the faces involved through and in certain forms of communication. It is this bridge concept that assigns two sides to the abstract notion of face: a non-material inner side and a material outer side. While the first is hypothesized in terms of values and claims, the second should be empirically graspable and could actually lead to a phenomenological categorisation.

Hence, two different theoretical issues have developed: on the one hand, there are the worldwide approved and discussed issues of politeness theories based on everyday interaction moments where personal claims are in danger. In order to prevent conflicts and to guarantee interpersonal cooperation and communicative efficiency, these moments should be verbally counteracted in a situationally appropriate way. By postulating so-called *face-threatening acts*

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(FTAs), face is tightened to various methods of conflict prophylaxis and, based on the pioneering work by Brown and Levinson in 1978/87, is initially equated with politeness as the strategic satisfaction of anthropologically universal wants and claims. This narrow view, which Watts identifies as “ethically positive behaviour” (Watts 2003: 130), will soon be further expanded to the necessary *relational work* with a largely neutral status as well as being opened up to form a continuum between the evaluative poles, *politeness* and *impoliteness*. The face negotiation theories, on the other hand, see conflicts as a communication clash between different cultural habits and determine face work as necessary ‘enlightened’ *rapport management* (cf. Spencer-Oatey 2000). This would involve the prevention of intercultural misunderstandings by a context-sensitive balancing of face-wants between autonomy vs. integration.

Communicative conflicts – no matter what type they may be – are, thus, seen by analysts as a theoretically secure area to trace face in face work, viz. to describe the nature of face on the basis of certain, above all linguistic, strategies. However, how this is actually done and which communicative categories, functions, structures and forms are applied, still remains difficult to define and can merely be determined as tendencies based on certain thematic occasions, speech acts or communicative events that infringe on the general code of behaviour and the social expectations implied. As before, the difficulty lies in converting the concepts, which in the meantime have been well differentiated, into real data. Even if Social Media construct presences primarily socially, it still remains largely unclear which *frames* and *lines* or which symbols and devices can be seen as presence-shaping and how faces actually emerge from the linguistic data and what type of faces they are.

These still unsolved problems are due above all to the unbroken fuzziness of the face concept itself, which, in spite of its concrete semantics, can hardly be used as a *tertium comparationis* for the

analysis of linguistic surface categories. As we know, Goffman in the 1960s was the first to apply the notion of face for the socially acquired and internalised values of a person. There are different culturally specific levels of awareness and implications, similar to terms as dignity or honour. Goffman subsumes them in the general definition as the “public self-image” and, ascribing it common ritual, theatrical and sacral characteristics, turns it into the normative centre of reference for any social interaction. As a result, the notion of face changes from a physiologically anchored lay concept to a model-theoretical construct, and becomes the key concept of sociopragmatics. In spite of its subsequent overuse in the various disciplines of cultural and social sciences, face still remains a multi-layered phenomenon which is difficult to define, continuously revealing new “faces” because of its non-material and material nature (cf. “the many faces of face”, Tracy 1990: 221).

Doubtlessly this is due to the interface position of the term between semantics and pragmatics. As ‘face’ originally means and stands for that central part of the body where the senses are actively concentrated (lat. FACIES) and the unmistakable individuality is “visible” (lat. VISUS), in their cognitive approach Lakoff/Johnson (1980) assign it the role of a “radial category”, which challenges both, metonymic extensions and metaphorical re-interpretations (cf. Bogdanowska-Jakubowska 2010: 32f.): the semantic path leads from the *inner self* to the *outer self* and, thus, from psychology to social ethics, i.e. the physiological term ‘face’ becomes stylised as the mirror of the soul, turns into the expression of the personality and stands for the reputation, fama or aura that persons as socialised individuals automatically possess and which are to be perceived as such by others. As this gets manifest only in social encounters, the term face is therefore strongly anchored there; thus, transferring from a static to a dynamic concept. Yet, in many languages there are idiomatic expressions and collocations that reflect

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some of the values and the social implications that the respective communities ascribe to face conceptions. The establishing process of these ascriptions and their reflections in everyday communication behaviour are, however, historically determined. In our view, the main issue is the humanistic concept of the human being from the Antiquity and the Renaissance. This is evidenced, for instance, by the treatment of face throughout academic history where it passed from the aesthetic-qualitative representation in art history through the physiognomic and psychological view of the natural sciences to the ethical-moral implications of philosophy and ultimately to the numerous ideological interpretations of modern and post-modern social theories. In spite of the different historical interpretations, a face term becomes established that is generally centred around the self. It, therefore, comes close to the term *self-identity*, which, as the *conditio sine qua non* of human nature, ultimately provides a wide range of interdisciplinary research. But due to the variety of individuality, self-identity is just as difficult to define and can neither be ascertained empirically. Nevertheless, the social-psychological study of identity gives cause to reflect on and theoretically sharpen the concept of face. Great importance is still assigned to the emic view of the internalised value structures acquired in socialisation. New, however, is an etic view, viz. the fact that identity is communicatively performed and as such perceivable in corresponding symbolic means of an ongoing social interaction. This is a necessary step to an analytical operationalisation and, thus, is presumed as a significant issue for further establishing of a phenomenology of the face concept that makes it tangible for applied sciences.

A summarising overview of the dimensions that the face concept has passed through on its way from a lay concept to a scientific construct and the various findings that emerge as still valid by being overlapped or differentiated will once again justify the diffi-

culty of conversion into real data: Arguing with Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2001: 36-37) that “*face* is not a simple concept”, three pragmatic dimensions are assumed responsible for this complexity,

“the

- locus of face, viz. the concern for self, other, or both;
- face valence, viz. whether face is being defended, maintained, or honoured;
- temporality, viz. whether face is being restored or proactively protected.”

(Bogdanowska-Jakubowska 2010: 245)

Based on the central point, the bond to the person and his or her identity – “face is an identity boundary phenomenon” (Ting-Toomey 1994: 2) or Spencer-Oatey’s “identity face” (2007: 650) – a spectrum of attributed face properties emerges. In accordance with the historical development of the concept they come into play under two aspects – a static and a dynamic one. See the schematic representation in fig. 1 (next page).

Interpreting the schema we can assume that face is at any rate an individual dimension that is related to biographical events. It is internalised and cognitively anchored as personality-determining “possessions” (cf. Sifianou 2012). However, since persons are social individuals, these “possessions”, or better: these features of “character”, have at the same time developed within the persons’ socialisation into a cultural context and are repeatedly being re-contoured by the natural striving for collective recognition and the growing affiliation to reference groups (*collective / fellowship face*). Face, therefore, stands for self-consciousness and at the same time represents the self-esteem established and acknowledged in social contacts (*autonomy face*). The sort, extent and importance of the individual components (*face domains*) are exclusively culturally shaped and result in strongly differing face sensitivities. These are only made aware and set in motion by and with others who perceive, provoke and evaluate them – face, therefore, exists only as

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projected face, which might be at stake in every social encounter. It consequently implies a relational dimension (cf. Arundale's concept of the "persons-in-relationship-to-other-persons" (sic!) 2006: 200), which is continually repositioned and focused through the mirror of others (*relational*).

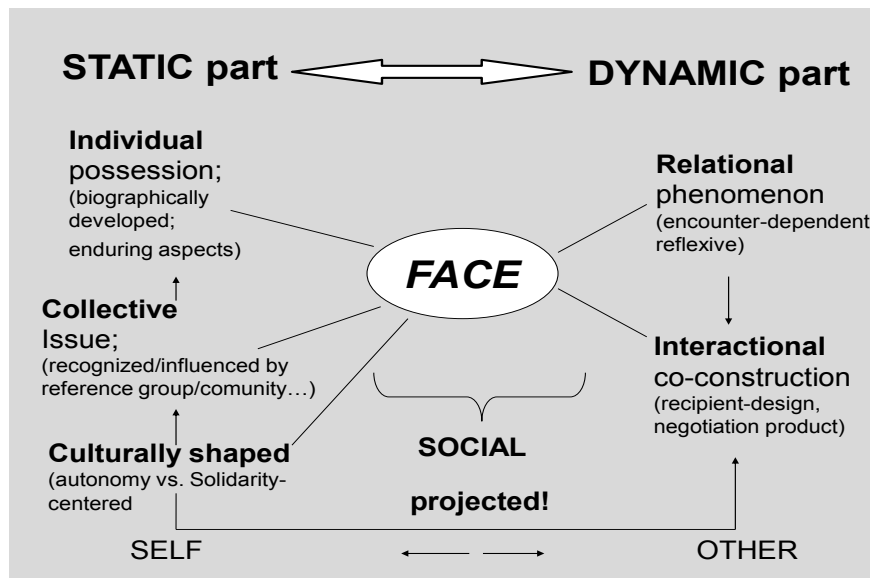


Fig. 1: The characteristics attributed to face in theory

The assumption that every socialised individual has a face turns social interaction in the interplay of reciprocal face maintenance and face saving into a constant process of *impression management*. As such, face automatically appears in symbolic interaction as action-immanent (*interactional*) and is then mutually projected during the process (*co-constructed*), jointly negotiated and, therefore, repeatedly re-summarised and differentiated. Haugh (2009) even goes as far as to say that face is not only "constituted by interaction", but is also "constitutive of interaction" and is "con-

straining language use and imposing on interactants certain patterns of behaviour” (Bogdanowska-Jakubowska 2010: 260).

Following this complexity, which is differently postulated, treated and weighted by the theories, face is omnipresent in all communication and can thus be considered as linguistically inherent. However, its importance and the impact of its properties differ according to the situation, the interpersonal constellation and the socio-cultural embedment, which means that it is hardly possible to ascertain binding activities or symbolic forms and to accept these as universal. We know how controversial and difficult it is to apply, for example, the canon of strategies of *positive* and *negative politeness* proposed by Brown and Levinson 1978/87 to real data; nevertheless, the transformation of face into a bipolar structure of wants (*positive* vs. *negative face*) created a connecting point to communicative reality which, at the same time, set guidelines for ‘correct’ social behaviour. In order to characterise this setting in the social exchange between *self* and *other*, and to allow analyses within pragmatic theory, a dualistic set of instruments with different ranges is constructed.

On the basis of the heuristic dualisms, as we have summarised them from the different theory approaches and schematically listed in fig. 2 (next page), normative, intentional-strategic and culture-typological categorisation possibilities of face-relevant actions become apparent. Initially, they are focused exclusively on supportive activities, which in an ethical sense (Spencer-Oatey 2000: 14 speaks of *sociality rights*) are aimed at interpersonal cooperation and consensus. However, they occur only *ex negativo*, in other words primarily in imminent conflict situations, and can, therefore, be identified and dissected as face-protecting, face-enhancing, face-saving and face-acknowledging actions.

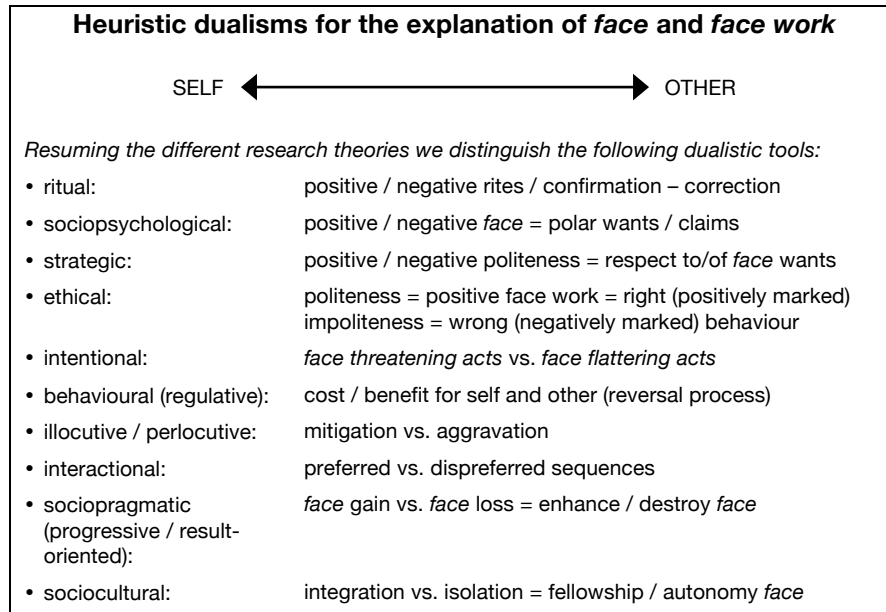


Fig. 2: Dualistic concepts for determining face and face work

In a first stage, they are equated with politeness. Due to the diffuse interpretation of this notion between the cultural-historical folk concept (politeness₁) and theoretical abstraction (politeness₂), the identification with politeness does not go far enough. The turn from a normative to an interpretive paradigm expands the view to the communication-immanent side of face work as relational work:

Face work is not a social requirement that must always be satisfied, but a means of manipulating a given relationship and/or situation. Face work, therefore, should be understood as a reflection of one's relational intention and action goals (Lim 1994: 227).

In other words, face is not only ratified in discourse, but is also mutually negotiated and re-contoured. It is, therefore, fundamentally manifested in every form of communication through the reactions of the other. Face work can, thus, be defined more generally

as “all actions which have a bearing on face” (O’Driscoll 2007: 467) and, therefore, includes a wide range of content, text structure and linguistic means, i.e. also those that go far beyond strategic politeness and consequently have face-destroying, face-threatening, face-aggravating, face-losing, etc. effects, and are either unmarked as “normal” or quite the opposite as impolite or over-polite (cf. Penman’s conception of face game 1990).

We can summarise with Bargiela-Chiappini, who sees face as a “complex image of self”, “which is socially constructed and shaped by culture”:

As a bridging concept between interpersonal interaction and social order ... *face*, at the micro-level of verbal and non-verbal behaviour, encapsulates and dynamically displays the manifestations of macro-level cultural values. (Bargiela-Chiappini 2006: 423)

Even Social Media can be described as “cultures”, i.e. they constitute and maintain communities of practice with specific “communication cultures”, which have developed certain standards and rules to be respected (e.g. so-called netiquette). As Social Media are primarily aimed at conveying social presence which is visualised on the screen, they seem to be highly appropriate to provide concrete symbolic indications of the different faces, which are involved in the ongoing forum communications. In accordance with the theories, *shared faces* or *conflictual faces* are as likely established as in everyday conversation; moreover, they can be followed in written text chunks and are, thus, to be studied more easily. What is new, however, is the multiple addressing of this media communication forms and, therefore, the multidimensionality of face-relevant actions between self-presentation and the construction of relationships. On the one hand, it involves self-directed face work, which attempts to optimally and demonstratively display the identity of the producer (*prestige face*), while on the

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other hand – as is usual in communication – it is a question of other-directed or relational face work, which the communication partners accordingly ratify, thus, expressing social awareness interactively (moral face). One might in each case assume different textual and (meta)linguistic devices, which are constantly overlapping and connecting – face and face work of Social Media are, therefore, hybrid constructs that represent new and major challenges for sociopragmatic research. This volume, which traces the facets and strategies of face work in the different forms of communication of Social Media and attempts to describe them in various kinds of communicative events, speech acts and formulation patterns, adds an important component.

According to the different contributions and their thematic and methodological focus, the volume is divided into four blocks:

Block 1 (*Theoretical Considerations on Face and Identity in Social Media*) contains several papers that study the concepts and terminology in detail and examine the field of *face – figura – identity – self* with reference to the realisation of such concepts in Social Media, where they play an extremely important role. In research, the concepts overlap, due to the fact that many disciplines draw borders differently between them. For example, the constructivist identity concept differs from the psychological one, which must have consequences for the definition of the concept of face. This is also true for the other concepts.

Stimulated by a dispute in an Italian internet forum, Gudrun HELD examines in her paper a terminological problem between the two semantically related concepts *figura* and *face*. While *face* has turned into a universal scientific construct of modern socio-pragmatics, by means of which social and linguistic behaviour can be theoretically explained, the notion of *figura*, an Italian lay concept idiomatically present in everyday language (*fare bella* vs. *brutta figura*), reflects the historical development of an appearance-

oriented self-identity that turns social encounters into permanent impression management. Trying to compare both concepts systematically leads not only to revisit the face construct and its various implications between politeness, cooperation and communicative efficiency in the different face theories, but also to the explanation of its outer side, viz. face work, which, in Social Media, is considered as a range of visualised verbal procedures of presence shaping.

The specifics of face work in online forum communication and the applicability of classical theories in this field are examined by Claus EHRHARDT. In his paper, he comes to the conclusion that involvement in online communication requires a “default face” for everyone, which has to be fundamentally respected but which each person can individually switch off for themselves.

Uta FRÖHLICH also shows that self-presentation in Social Media is linked with the identity of those who are communicating and with the individual face that they want to present. According to her, this presentation is multicodal, which means that it applies not only to texts in which persons are expressing themselves but also to profile creation, images, signatures and allusions to shared knowledge.

The papers in Block 2 (*Construction of Group Identity in Social Media*) examine, besides other aspects, a special feature of Social Media communication: the contexts are primarily dialogic, but interaction often occurs among larger groups. Participants of the platforms establish links between each other. FTAs towards individual members of a different group can damage the face of the group as a whole and vice versa, thus promoting an identity for the group.

The paper by Kristina BEDIJS further develops Goffman’s concept of *shared face* and applies it to Social Media. She provides examples to show that groups can also have a face. Members of the group often feel that their individual face is affected when the shared face

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is threatened or enhanced, which is shown in offended or flattered reactions to face work.

In the social network Facebook, status updates are mainly used to make contact with others and to maintain the user's presentation to the outside. In their paper, Brook BOLANDER and Miriam LOCHER examine how the choice of language in the status updates is used for signalling affiliation and thus for relational work in whole groups.

Daria DAYTER and Sofia RÜDIGER discuss how mutual criticism is expressed in the CouchSurfing community. As this community is based on mutual trust and the willingness to provide overnight accommodation in their own homes, user ratings that contain criticism and negative judgements have to be formulated in a way to avoid further conflicts and to maintain a good host image. This is why many negative evaluations contain mitigating strategies that anticipate future interactions in the community and that can be judged as face work.

Jenny ARENDHOLZ examines interaction in a forum community. Her paper focuses primarily on the negotiation of status, which is measured for example by the length of membership and the activity of the users in the communities. Using the example of the community *The Student Room*, she shows that newcomers first have to earn the right to perform certain verbal actions.

Block 3 (*Face Threatening and Face Flattering in Online Communication*) is dedicated to examining linguistic strategies that are used online with consequences for one's own face and that of others.

Christiane MAASS shows, on the basis of Watts' model, that online communication on interaction platforms tends to be marked. Due to the media conditions, utterances can be misunderstood or ambiguous. This often leads to a discussion about how a post is to be interpreted and about a third party who may also be reading –

a potential FTA. To counteract this, verbal, paraverbal and non-verbal strategies aim at marking the post as “polite”. Users increase the situational embedding of their posts through multiple codes by means of their user profile with their avatar, signature, etc. – options many platforms provide and thus support such behaviour.

Comments on recipes in a French and Italian cooking community are examined by Verena THALER. She discovers how users avoid open criticism and use various diluting strategies to ensure that the potential FTA is mitigated. These include, for example, messages formulated in the first person to deflect the criticism from the addressed person, and praise aimed at balancing and putting the criticism into perspective.

Uta HELFRICH dedicates her paper to collective attacks against absent third parties. The users, who do not know each other, construct a shared concept of the enemy which they then make fun of, attacking it collectively in the form of so-called ‘flaming’. Even if the person being attacked is unaware of it, this FTA has the effect of enhancing the shared face of the group of attackers.

The construction of a shared enemy is also the subject of the paper by Bettina KLUGE. She examines the phenomenon of the troll, a user who joins a constructive debate with the intention of systematically destroying it by making hurtful or meaningless contributions or ones that detract from the subject. The paper looks at how a community cooperatively construes a user as a troll and how it deals with this disruptive behaviour.

Nadine RENTEL analyses messages on the micro-blogging platform Twitter. She focuses on the question of how users construct face for a disperse public. She finds that users restrain themselves linguistically, for example by formulating their opinion as a question or by expressing uncertainty.

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The fourth block of the volume (*Face in Experts and Laypeople Communication in Social Media*) is dedicated to an area which linguistics has become increasingly interested in: the construction of the roles of “expert” and “layperson” in communication. Ascribing such roles to oneself or to a discourse partner is of major significance for face. The discourse participants negotiate these roles in their exchange, performing or preventing face threats or enhancements in their communicative acts.

Martina SCHRADER-KNIFFKI analyses how such status attributions are developed in the French forum *Français notre belle langue*. Users of this community discuss language-related topics, usually on the level of laypeople in linguistics. However, the self-presentation of the participants plays an important role in the discussion, which is often the result of intentionally subjectified speech acts. In this way, the users develop evidentiality and co-constructed knowledge.

A similar forum, *Languefrancaise.net*, is examined by Melanie KUNKEL. In this case too, the users debate on the French language, especially about norms and their correct application. Users often position themselves as teachers or linguists in order to appear as experts and thus validate their arguments.

The difference between experts and laypeople is also the subject of the paper by Gesa LINNEMANN, Benjamin BRUMMERNHENRICH and Regina JUCKS. In an experiment in pedagogical psychology, they examine efficient knowledge acquisition in e-learning contexts. In the experiment, tutors applied various strategies to criticise the learners’ results, with different intensity levels of face threat. If mitigating strategies were used, the learners considered the tutors to be more credible.

The paper by Beatrix KRESS provides a contrastive study of face work in German and Russian online communication. She analyses users’ comments in online newspapers and comes to the conclu-

sion that Russian debates tend to have a more direct style, whereas German users more frequently apply humour to mitigate FTAs.

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Part I

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS
ON FACE AND IDENTITY
IN SOCIAL MEDIA

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Figura... or Face? Reflections on Two Sociopragmatic Key Concepts in the Light of a Recent Media Conflict Between Italians and Germans and Its Negotiation in Italian Internet Forums

1. Introductory remarks

Immediately after the accident of the cruise liner *Costa Concordia* near the Italian island of Giglio in January 2012, in which the ship's captain, Francesco Schettino, cowardly left his ship without managing the rescue of 4,000 passengers, the media and the internet were full of comments on this avoidable tragedy and the captain's unacceptable behaviour.

Among the global reactions, an ironic column published in the online edition of the German news magazine DER SPIEGEL gave the worldwide discourse a sharp turn by provoking (once again)¹ a fierce verbal controversy between Italians and Germans. The

¹ Such a media controversy between Italy and Germany based on historically developed mutual heterostereotypia (cf. the two books by Heitmann 2003 and 2004) is nothing new. There are, for instance, the reactions concerning the SPIEGEL cover from 31/1977 (a gun on a pasta dish) and 29/2011 (Berlusconi as a gondolier) or several football world championships and so on. Cf. for instance Mazza Moneta 1999 and more concrete Ehrhardt 2007 (online manuscript).

column – entitled “*Italienische Fahrerflucht*” (= Italian hit-and-run driving) – was introduced by the following derisive remark:

Bella figura machen, heisst der italienische Volkssport, bei dem es darum geht, andere zu beeindrucken. Auch Francesco Schettino wollte eine gute Figur machen, leider war ihm ein Felsen im Weg. (Spiegel Online 2012)

Presenting a ‘bella figura’ (a ‘beautiful’ = good figure) is the Italian national sport, which is all about making a good impression on others. Francesco Schettino is one of those who wanted to make a good impression, but unfortunately a rock got in his way.

This key sentence, which was intended to be nothing other than a rhetorical teaser aimed at turning the readers’ attention to the European crisis, was evidently misunderstood by the Italians: the fact that a German journalist compared the tragic shipwreck to the slump in the European economy by relating Schettino’s irresponsibility with the cultural stereotype of the Italian happy-go-lucky *pappagallo* was too much for the already *bunga-bunga* shaken Italy, and was thus seen as a collective offence to the national pride. In addition to a protest letter from the Italian Ambassador to Germany, this SPIEGEL column immediately sparked millions of furious comments in web 2.0 blogs. At the same time, a flood of reactions in all different kinds of media arose, revitalising the historical ascriptions, viz. ‘lazy’ (but happy) Italians versus ‘hard-working’ (but unhappy) Germans, (cf. Heitmann 2003), through the contrasting figures of “Schettino” and “Merkel”. Increasingly rich imagery, exploited for all kinds of visual and verbal caricatures, was developed.² Finally, newspapers, mainly the reputed *La Repubblica*, did not shy away from going back to the situation in

² See, for instance, the title in the *Tagesanzeiger*, Zürich: “Fauler Italiener, überheblicher Deutscher” (2012-01-24), or the satirical stylisation of the German chancellor, Angela Merkel, as the fleeing captain of the ship *Europa Discordia* in the newspaper *Libero* (2012-01-26).

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World War II. But then, a coup took place which changed everything and pushed the whole affair into the world press: “*A noi Schettino, a voi Auschwitz*” was the headline of the Berlusconi-close tabloid *Il Giornale*, on 27th January 2012. All of a sudden, this turned an airy-fairy *bufera in rete* into a tasteless twisting of history: the populist discussion about intercultural clichés now developed into an evil discourse about race, which egged on national prejudices long thought to be dead and, presumably, was played by both sides against the other with political calculation. Abusing the luring repertoire of Nazi connotations, Italians no longer worried about attacking and offending the Germans, thus reflecting a frightening picture of the vitality of nationalism and its easy outbreak into a hostile “clash of cultures”. At the time this article was written (March 2012), the mutual baiting in the internet was in full swing.

In my opinion, the trigger to this media row turned out to be the unhappy use of the holy notion of “*fare bella figura*” in the mouth of a German journalist; hence, *figura* – and no longer the failing captain Schettino – became the main subject of the never-ending Italian forum outrages I am still following with astonishment from outside. Thus, within the context of this volume entitled “Face work and Social Media”, I decided to look at the notion of *figura*, as mentioned above in the key sentence of the online column, from a linguistic perspective. On the one hand, it is the key subject of this intercultural dispute, and, on the other hand, it bears directly upon the concept of *face work*, including broadly based discussions in pragmatic research. Not only does this term embody Italian-ness as seen from the outside, but it also represents a common inner value that is kept in continuous tension between the two ethical points of reference – *bello* (good) versus *brutto* (bad). *Fare bella figura* can therefore be considered the epitome of what is regarded as typically Italian without being really definable or

describable (cf. the American translation of Severgnini's book 2006). Even though the term is semantically and pragmatically fuzzy, the manifestation of *figura* as a good or bad image that individuals constantly reveal in interaction with others is without doubt the most important identity criterion of Italian cultural behaviour, and thus rightly serves as the key fuel in the SPIEGEL column and the verbal harassing it still provokes between Italians and Germans.

Encouraged by the current example, I would like to deal with the question of why and how Italian-ness is constructed and defined through the term *figura*. A diachronic, a synchronic and a comparative view of the term's semantic development, its collocations and co-occurrences will soon shape it against another key notion of modern pragmatics, the notion of *face*. As we are concerned with this obvious metonymic relationship between the two conceptions, our observations are automatically positioned in the framework of the theories of interaction, viz. particularly, the paradigm of politeness. Without doubt, *fare figura* has to do with politeness and can therefore also be connected to the concept of *face work*. However, how and why these concepts are related has not been examined systematically as yet. Thus, finer clarification in both the semantic relationship between *figura* and *face* and their pragmatic coverage might not only throw some light onto intercultural discourse and communication, but could also lead to further theoretical and methodological findings in modern socio-pragmatics (cf. Haas 2009; from a linguistic point of view Wierzbicka 1991; Trosborg 2010 or consecutive issues of the *Journal of Intercultural Pragmatics*).

In this context, the question of the role and meaning of *figura* seems all the more interesting. As mentioned above, in the SPIEGEL discourse the Italians themselves get quickly caught up in a paradox: the 'noble' defence of their *bella figura* developed obvi-

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ously into an ignoble *brutta figura*. Or, could we also say in modern terminology: *face defence* turned into *face loss*? Thus, if there is a connection between *figura* and *face*, are the terms really conceptionally interchangeable in such situations? And can they be used in an ethno-psychological sense (as, for example, Kainz 1941-1965 has done) in order to characterise people, ethnics or nations idealistically? What will happen if the confusion is made even worse through the usage of some more competitive terms such as *identity*, *image*, *honour*, *dignity*...?

The enormous number of reactions from Italians and Germans caused by the Schettino problem in all forms of Social Media thus offers a never-ending corpus for linguistic studies from different points of view. This paper will first deal with the Italian reactions to the column in SPIEGEL online in a selected Italian chat forum (cf. Schettino corpus). The data are enlightening insofar as they deal with the *figura* problem on various levels: on a meta-linguistic and thus discursive level, on an interlingual level (due to the distinct cultural approaches of the users and the filtering through different attempts to translate and to report) and on the level of the ongoing verbal negotiation itself. With regard to the latter, *figura* is interesting in two ways: on the one hand, it is the topic to be dealt with and, on the other hand, it is an intrinsic process, which means that it is shaped and judged through verbal behaving in the postings thus coming out as either *bella* or *brutta figura*. Or is it all about *face*, which becomes 'visible' in the text and which is developed during the communication among the different users? This last question leads us directly to the area of sociopragmatics, where *verbal action* equals *social action*, which is defined as aiming at rational cooperation in order to sensibly handle and balance communicative conflicts. Such verbal conduct due to be situationally appropriate is called *face work*. *Computer-mediated communication* (CMC) needs to be written and thus lends itself to proper em-

pirical surveillance of such strategies. Whatever one thinks about the value of *figura*, whether it is seen as positive or negative, there is no doubt that it deals with the realisation of *face*. If there is a mutual *face* acknowledgement among the participants, there is yet another, competing concept involved, namely *politeness*. Thus, our discussion around *figura* deals not only with a term, but also with a corresponding pragmatic paradigm developed to explain interactive action in general. This further condenses our considerations theoretically.

According to these introductory remarks, the study will contrast the notions of *figura* and *face* by outlining the following points:

- 1) a brief comparative study of the two notions concerning their terminological development as a result of the cultural-semantic implications;
- 2) a draft of the main sociopragmatic concepts of *face* (and *face work*) in order to figure out continuities and differences with the concept of *figura*;
- 3) a discussion of these findings within the theory of *(im)politeness* and its different interpretations as lay-concept or scientific modelling;
- 4) the provision of methodological tools due to further application to the data of the *Schettino corpus* where *figura* and *face* are supposed to be reflected in written language cues.

2. *Figura* – a cultural-semantic excursus

The awareness that human feelings are physiologically ‘exteriorised’ is as old as mankind itself. The body, its posture, and, primarily, the face, as the physical part which is permanently visible (VISUM) due to its being unconcealed in most cultures, are per-

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ceived as a mirror of personality (cf. also Stagl 1994 concerning the concept of "honour"). Whereas physicalness as a whole is a product of collective rules and regulations which shape it and represent both culture and 'modes' to the outside world, the face is unique; as the visible epitome of singular traits of character it represents the key to the subject. The Latin word FIGURA and its development within European languages gives evidence of this perceptible field of tension, which has been carried forward from antiquity onwards through the many anti-carnal centuries in the Middle Ages, over the Renaissance to Modernity. The humanistic idea of man (Germ. '*Menschenbild*') integrated physiological and psychological characteristics into an aesthetic whole representing power. During the Enlightenment, this idea turned into a rational calculation of social climbing, which in the 19th century is further charged with morality, manners and decency, finally spotlighting current mental states through the influence of psychoanalysis. Outward appearance always plays a central role; hence, a person could not only be accepted but also classified socially. *Figura* thus refers to "visible" corporality as a material outlook.³

In the Renaissance, *figura* referred exclusively to physical appearance (*apparenza*), as perceived by others. It implied the aesthetic potential to elicit pleasure (*delectare*) as well as 'pleasing' others (*placere*). *Contegno*, *grazia* and *spezzatura* are the demands which the *perfetto cortegiano* should radiate in his presence. According to the aristocratically influenced value system, this should happen not only through the stature, but, more specifically, through outward behaviour ((*com*)*portamento*, cf. Wandruszka 1954; cf. also Stagl,

³ This does not go without saying if we look at the semantic development of the term (from lat. FINGERE "to form", "to model") via the denomination of a special shape (compare modern engl. *figure*) and the different characteristics of its forms (for instance, rhetorical, grammatical, artistic etc., "figures") to the antonomastic access to the person itself. In spite of all semantic and formal diversification the lowest common multiple of this word field is nevertheless the outer "appearance".

concerning ‘honour’ 1994). In my opinion, the major works of the Renaissance, *Cortegiano* and *Galateo*, focus the term *figura* to a collective, ‘polished’ and thus ‘glossy’ attitude (*pulitezza* > French *politesse*, Engl. *politeness*), which tie the courtly ideal of civilisation to urban bourgeois (monetary) power and thus evoke the illusion of a good reputation, which is achieved through personal effort and was thus worth representing to the outside (cf. Burke’s concept of “conspicuous consumption”, Burke 1987: 111). The ideal depiction of human qualities and advantages can also be found in the so called “*ritratto*” (cf. also Christiansen/Weppelmann 2011). As an “image” of glory and wealth, the portrait is the preferred artistic instrument used with regard to seigniorial marriage politics, but shows at the same time the central role of the face in the demonstrative presentation and characterisation of outstanding personalities within the competitive context of aristocratic origin and social standing.⁴ In fact, the popular *ritratto* projects the gaze from the *figura* to the *viso*, literally the ‘visible’, which emanates the high rank and thus turns into an indexical value scale of the hierarchically organised society.

This physiological metonymy between body and face seems to be inherent within the notion of *figura*. It is later on reflected in the polysemy of the French term *figure*, which developed during the verbal *bienséance* in the 17th century. The ordinary word *face* (directly taken from Latin *FACIES*) was substituted by the euphemism *figure*, especially as it referred to something naked and thus of bad taste. According to another hypothesis, *face* phonetically coincided with *fesses* (‘thighs’), an equally ignoble term that had to be abo-

⁴ Cf. also the concept of *vera effigie* (‘real copy’) in the art of portraiture during the Renaissance.

lished. In either case, it was seen by the courteous society as not appropriate to the so-called *bon usage*.⁵

This example of the French extension of meaning leads to the second point of my arguments, namely that *face*, in contrast to the figure or body, focuses on individuality and thus on subjective uniqueness. This view is based on the antique psychological knowledge that facial expression is the mirror of the human soul.⁶ Thus, Latin has two expressions referring to face, *FACIES* (from *FACIO*, 'I shape, I form') and *VISUS*, the effectively "seen", the perceived part of the body. In terms of cultural history, this points to the majority of customs to leave the face (as the place of the senses) unveiled and thus openly present it. The Romance languages, however, deal differently with the two terms: in Italian we have *faccia* and *viso* as different varieties of usage, whereas in French we have *face* (*face à face*) and *visage*, the latter a derivation of the old French *vis* (*vis-à-vis*), which, for phonological reasons, shows different diachronic stages. The Ibero-Romance languages take the Greek *CARA* and additionally differentiate it stylistically with the metonymic *ROSTRUM* ('beak') (Port. *rosto*). German, however, prefers various calques of *VISUM*: *Gesicht*, *Angesicht*, *Antlitz* (the Indo-European prefix *ant-* means 'towards', 'in the face of'; viz. *Antlitz* thus is the part of the body that 'looks back' to us in the social encounter), but German also knows the French borrowing *visage* as an either derogatory or technical term. Only English simply keeps *FACIES* as the standard word *face*. Hence, *face* then becomes a technical term of sociopragmatics, and as such turns into an

⁵ This is why French today has a differentiated word-field concerning *face*, its idiomatic collocations and the word-formation in this area. The derivational *figuration* is of special interest for us as it is often used as the French translation of the English term *face work*. While the English expression *face* is directly transferred into the French *face*, *face work* is translated into *travail de la face* respectively *figuration* with or without inverted commas (cf. Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1992, second part).

⁶ Cf. for instance *facial expression* in Wikipedia.

internationally used key notion we will deal with in more detail, by arguing in contrast to Italian *figura*.

As we have seen, *figura* reflects cultural evolution standing for collective physical presence. However, during the Renaissance, this 'visible' embodiment was stylised into the ideal form of the perfect humanistic personality, predominantly manifesting itself in the outward appearance, the so-called *bella presenza*. After the decline of the seigniorial glory and Italy's regression into foreign domination, the *figura* ideal remained as a unifying factor within the collective memory. However, it did not degenerate into the pure illusion of a splendid, but unreturnable past; on the contrary, it becomes the daily pleasure of putting the proper self adequately on stage by reviving and inventing ever more theatrical forms of self-representation: *fare figura* turned into the basic principle of post-rinascimental *art de vivre*; enriched with values of the respective societal context *fare bella figura* vs. *fare brutta figura* turned out to be the performative key to right or wrong behaviour, which provided the fragile social order with regulative lines of rights and morality. At the same time, it guaranteed a common mental commitment during a time of lawless foreign dominance, making living together bearable as it hid social competition and injustice behind the skilful demonstration of a beautiful façade.

Nevertheless, outer form is kept together with the help of strict inner rules. Regardless of whether it was the cultural group or era which decided what was considered beautiful and what ugly, (cf. Eco 2004 and 2010) the *figura* concept turned out to be a covert method of judgement learned in the socialisation of those who grew up in Italian territory. Its outer handling and inner valuating in the range of *bello* vs. *brutto* became the social imperative for all Italians, unifying the experienced in-group against an extraneous out-group. Without doubt, Italian language is the most telling mirror of this development. According to Lurati (1997: 310), particu-

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larly *fare bella figura* is an expression witnessed and frequently used already in the 17th century even in all dialects. Regardless of local origin, it is an expression of general estimation; what or who is considered *bello* simply depends on the other's vision – it is the look, the visual effect that a *figura* makes in and to the community. That is why *apparir bene* becomes the leitmotif of people being aware of constantly making a good impression. Hence, people's art of living is the great art of delighting the others by themselves, by *la bella presenza*, which is not simply an aesthetic way of self-presenting, but a general respectful kindness, a disinterested openness that puts a simply embellishing masquerade over social reality and difference. As *bella figura* is the norm, it can apparently be performed by everyone regardless of his or her social background. This makes it – paradoxically – a social equaliser which guarantees the stability of societal organisation.

The *brutta figura* (today more frequently named as *figuraccia*), on the contrary, is considered a violation of the norm and thus implies the feared condemnation by the *comunità*, including loss of reputation and honour. This expression is witnessed a little later. But as language is also the mirror of ongoing social processes, Italian has developed a range of depreciating idiomatic phrases which reflect the inability to perform *bella figura*. This is considered typical for emarginated social groups; that is why we find idioms like the North-Italian *fare una figura da cioccolataio*,⁷ further *figura da cameriere*, *figura del parente povero*, *figura da barbone*, procuring the linguistic proof that the *figura* concept has steadily turned into a tool for social (even racist) depreciation. This trend is still very productive today, constituting a wide range of common popular

⁷ According to Lurati 1997: 311, this is due to the faces of the chocolate workers which are stained with dark chocolate or to the chocolate characters in sweet shops, “che raffiguravano a vivi colori poveri negri delle piantagioni centroamericane con un aspetto molto primitivo e sciocco”.

expressions like *figura da stupido*, *figura da stronzo*, etc. and, in an offensive sense, even *figura di merda*. Last but not least, this diversity of expressions shows that negative emotions always provoke more drastic imagery and are thus language-wise more vital than positive feelings.

Even though *bella figura* has manifested itself mainly through communicative behaviour since the Renaissance (cf., for instance, Guazzo's *Civil Conversazione*) and thus affects verbal manners and comportment (Castiglione's *Cortegiano*), it is always the person per se who is the centre of the *figura* concept: it embraces the construction of the ego in its convenient appearance and has a social function insofar as it turns encounters into a pleasant but primarily visual event. The concept of *face*, on the contrary, refers to a completely different aspect of social encounter, namely the one which evolves through interaction and is shared (*shared face*) and concretely put into practice at a communicative level. From this, we could deduce in advance that *figura* is always connected with the EGO, whereas *face* depends more on the ALTER and is thus a reflexive term. This assumption can also be justified through the consequences which ensue for the *figura* concept in the respective historical context: the tension between how one is looked at and what one looks like finally always focuses on the stylisation of the self, not only by making up the physical appearance and the 'good looking', but also by cultivating the personal ambiance of living, environment and lifestyle. This determines the whole way of living in Italian culture.⁸

It is, actually, not only the external view that turns the art of *bella figura* into this "typical" Italian sense of style and appearance,

⁸ Today's consumer society also uses the term for Italian design, fashion labels, aesthetic art, and for guidelines concerning Galateo with visible results of specific creativity and event culture (for instance, the title of books such as: *Il galateo a tavola per fare sempre bella figura*, *La bella figura in cucina*, etc.).

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which foreigners, even after a certain amount of experience in Italy, cannot copy as being the “inimitable art of a beautiful image” (Severgnini). No, it also refers to the experience of the public sphere (such as the dramatic appeal of customs and traditions, public manifestation forms, the political show culture and particularly the mediatisation of society itself peaking in the Berlusconi televised ego-cult) or to certain kinds of sacral and profane architecture (thus, churches are, for instance, seen as a “predecessor of the glory of heaven” (Hoffmann 2010) and city houses are generally called *palazzo*). It also sets the rules and regulations for appropriate behaviour within private relationships (even within marriage!) as well as in social networking and career systems. It extends from having advantages in groups to the *omertà* principle of the mafia. To put it into a nutshell: what seems to be “normal” or even innate behaviour for Italians is striking only for foreigners. So-called strangers are speechless when they are confronted with the art of “perfect illusion” (Barzini 1965) and feel that they are outsiders who cannot be integrated either in their inner or outer state. They might even feel like a physical emanation of a *brutta figura*, torn between jealousy and admiration. It is therefore not surprising that people travelling to Italy perceive *figura* either directly or indirectly as the engine of this non-specific longing which makes this country “where the lemons are in bloom” (Goethe) so attractive but unattainable. It is not for nothing that cultural studies, tourist guides and sociological literature are full of attempts to describe the *bella figura*, explaining the secrets of its aura and the extension of its effects.⁹ Looking at the innumer-

⁹ Forums in the world wide web make it obvious that people can neither define the term nor translate it convincingly, e.g.: “I am still trying to wrap my head around the concept of *fare bella figura*. It literally means “to make a beautiful figure”, but most people would translate it as “a good impression”. Truthfully, it is a little of both – and it’s singularly Italian. In order to possess a *bella figura*, you must look put-together. (...) But this is just the most basic level of the *bella figura*, the surface clues to a more complex outlook on

able commentaries on *bella figura* on the internet (only very few are mentioned in footnote 9) and their evaluations from both an inner and outer perspective, it becomes clear why it is the *figura* principle that turned into a marker of national identity, and is thus exploited in today's media discourse, used for consumption and economic competition, and politically played off against other cultures and ideologies.

This is the cultural context in which the discourse concerning the Schettino affair and the Italian provocation through the use of the *figura* stereotype has taken place. To reveal the multi-layered complexity, further remarks on the concept of *figura*, especially with regard to language, are necessary. Even though *figura* is described mainly from the outside as "the good impression" deriving from outward appearance, an inner capacity which equally remains incomprehensible for foreigners needs to be seen as connected to it as well. *Fare figura* also means having the necessary amount of sensitivity and diplomacy and expressing this successfully in language. This obviously implies a skilful verbal acting which has its

life. Deep down it means ... caring about detail and quality, it means having poise, being hospitable, and appreciating those qualities in others (The Great Whatsit 2007). See also many personal comments in postings on www.italienforum.de. Looking at the internet it also becomes clear that the impossibility of arriving at a definition of *bella figura* also leads to stereotypes and the acclaimed "substantial principle of Italianity" (Severgnini 2006: 7) mutates to national prejudices and supports political ideologies: „*Fare una bella figura* is a cultural and societal cornerstone for Italians. ... *Fare una bella figura* isn't simply aesthetic, it's a matter of respect and active participation in Italian society" (Student comment in Flo'n the Go 2012) or: "Many people have been trying to depict the value- or non-value- of the beautiful SCHEIN ('appearance') (...) In Italy it has long been accepted as a part of culture that cannot be rejected. It has been given another name which is not derogatory: *la figura*, the figure, the shape, there is something concrete to it, especially when it is *bella* (...). But *fare bella figura* is not all about decorum and clothes, it needs to be there for the whole of Italian life ... it is this which leads to having followers and appeal." And a conclusion from a historical point of view: "Non-Italians don't have the *Rinascimento*, the genetic disposition for the Italian talent of self-marketing without which a *bella figura* could never exist." (Posted on vabene@rom.goethe.org, accessed 2012-04-21). Other comments on *bella figura* cf. also Nardini 1999.

consequences on Italian language. Thus, in relation to the *figura* principle, an interesting tension between two antagonistic sides seems to be apparent in the situation of Italian language: on the one hand, there is a really relaxed attitude towards a frequent use of vocabulary and idioms from the sub-standard, including sexual expressions, which, to this extent, is not to be found in any other Romance language. This does not endanger *bella figura* and leads by no means to *brutta figura*. On the other hand, there are rather explicit rules concerning verbal *garbo* in Italian. This means that the Italians have “a collective consciousness for a good communication style” (Severgnini 2006: 173), which turns Italian speaking into a subtle art of successfully enacted self-management. Hence, there is no doubt that the principle of making a *bella figura* also concerns communicative behaviour, in all its facets of physicalness, viz. with regard to kinetics, gestures, mimicry and, verbally, with regard to prosody, stylistics and rhetoric. This assumption can be proven by a rich repertoire of person-bound routine formulae perceived as commonly polite (viz. well-wishing such as *abbi pazienza*, *mi raccomando*, or the amount of smoothing replies to acts of thanking such as *S’immagini*, *Si figuri* which pragmatically enrich the universal inventory such as *prego*, *di niente* or *non c’è di che*). There are the frequent direct allocutions mentioning name and title as well as the historically connoted differentiation of address pronouns (such as *voi* vs. *lei/loro*), the morpho-pragmatic handling of the quantitative and qualitative suffixes and the way of using indirect utterances, modality processes and euphemism.

Many of these particular language abilities were already identified by Spitzer as early as 1922 in his description of *Italienische Umgangssprache* (“Italian colloquial language”) in association with a specific “tricky” politeness. Drawing on idealistic linguistics, Spitzer does not hesitate to characterise Italian intuitively as a language of dialogue per se, where subtle aesthetic, stylistic variation

and context-sensitive flexibility are skilfully united in order to realise the 'good conversation' propagated already by Guazzo during the Renaissance. With regard to language history, we should briefly mention that the major argument for the Italian *questione della lingua* is primarily the awareness of a supra-regional adequacy and policy for all communicative situations. This emphasises the idea of a common and unifying *idioma gentile* (De Amicis) that respects appropriate social behaviour.¹⁰ *Fare bella figura* appears thus to be an inherent part of Italian culture: in regard to language it even turns out to be the communicative autopoiesis which constantly controls and automatically cleanses even the language system (consider, for instance, the leitmotif of the *Crusca*-Academy). As opposed to this, *brutta figura* is a kind of social gaffe, performed by pragmatically inappropriate language use. What is excusable for outsiders is socially sanctioned for insiders who are then considered as uncivilised and illiterate fellows. This shows yet again that communicative competence in Italian is judged in a large extent by the principle of *figura*.

3. *Face* – a rival term and its theoretical formation

The discussion of the verbal manifestations of the *figura* concept automatically leads to the area of politeness, especially in terms of verbal politeness. Thus, the cultural-historical excursus rightly draws our attention to current pragma-linguistic research, where the concept of *politeness* plays a crucial role by retaining two understandings. On the one hand, there is the traditional lay con-

¹⁰ *Gentile* has had a special connotation ever since the *Dolce Stil Nuovo*. This is something that cannot be discussed here, but is automatically implied when referring to De Amicis.

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ception, based on historical and culture-specific value implications that are learned and experienced by the members of each cultural group in the ongoing socialisation process. This acquired know-how conducts social interaction in order to make participants feel at ease, and consists in mutual strategies of appropriate verbal behaviour, mostly based on a repertoire of formulae and routine speech acts. On the other hand, *politeness* is understood from a scientific point of view, where it forms the basis of a theorem to help to universally explain communicative interaction in general (according to Eelen 2001 and Watts 2003 *politeness*₁ versus *politeness*₂). The scientific understanding of the term constitutes the so-called politeness paradigm (or Grice-Goffman paradigm) and has been causing a boom of research among many different cultures, languages, communicative events and situations ever since the pioneering work of Brown/Levinson in 1978/87. Up until today, it has been both approved and criticised from various points of view. The central question is the empirical appearance and, so to speak, the language concreteness of such strategic processes which apply to the two distinct understandings of politeness (cf. Held 2010 and 2011). Therefore, a normative benchmark is needed. This is found and constructed in the concept of *face*.

Initiated by Goffman's sociopsychological approach, *face* turns into the basic and referential concept of the theoretical grasp to the notion of *politeness*. Due to its development within the Anglophone context, *face* is constituted and generalised as a rival term to *figura*. In one of his seminal publications, "On Face-work", Goffman defines *face* as "an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes – albeit an image that others may share, as when a person makes (...) a good showing for himself [sic]" (1967: 5). It remains to be discussed whether and in how far the 'good showing' through *face* differs from the Italian *figura*. However, it is clear that the concept of *face* turns into an abstract value

to be the normative centre of every rational interaction and thus determines the *lines* (in Goffman's own terminology) of actions in order to avoid conflicts by respecting general cooperation to mutual advantage. Hence, *face* is a dynamic concept which is only activated and negotiated in interpersonal encounters. It is thus inherently communicative and manifests itself only symbolically, viz. mainly in language. As a purely communicative action with a social-harmonizing effect, *politeness* is thus generally directed to satisfying the wants and claims of *face* by activating a range of appropriate verbal strategies and attitudes.

From his studies on *face* and *politeness*, O'Driscoll (1996 and 2010) draws the following interesting conclusion concerning the term *face*: "Face we have, politeness we do". This means that he differentiates between the two concepts according to endogenous vs. exogenous aspects. If we attempt to formulate this conclusion using the term *figura*, it would read: "*face we have, figura we do*" (= *fare una bella* or *brutta figura!*). In opposition to *face* which, as an inherent – normally unconscious – quality of each socialised individual is yielded only in confrontation with the other and as such mutually approved or threatened, *figura* has a uni-directional, result-oriented character. It is symbolically created in order to find one's own personal confirmation; the other is just the mirror and, lacking reciprocity, is not responsible for its judgement, nor for its forms. That is why, for the sake of my discussion, we have to take into account the *fare...figura* which, as a strategic interaction process in which a good or bad result is achieved, comes closer to the concept of (*im*)*politeness*. Both activities are concerned with communication. However, a look at the related concept of *politeness* illustrates more precisely the differences between *face* and *figura*. They will become even more explicit when considering their exact role during the communicative process. In my view, if we want to judge certain behaviour forms as polite, *face* can then be seen as

their catalyst, whereas *figura* is intended to be their goal. But it is difficult to find evaluation categories to verify this assumption.

Let us thus try to grasp the relationship between *face* vs. *figura* again from the point of view of semantics. As shown in the first part of this paper, both terms have the same core meaning: it is the denotation 'face' which, according to the respective cultural context, alternates between the more physical or more psychical embodiment. As we have already seen, *face* is a direct descendant of the Latin FACIES from FACIO 'to make, to form, to shape' (It. *faccia*, O.Fr. *face/faz*, Span. *faz*, Port. *face*, Rum. *față*, Engl. *face*). With regard to the 'revelation' of the personality (*persona* 'mask') and its uniqueness, a concrete second term developed in Latin, namely VISUS, 'the seen' which was borrowed in German as 'Angesicht' (and later *Gesicht*). It continues to exist in the Romance languages in It. *viso*, O.Fr. *vis* / Fr. *visage*, Sp. *visual*, Port. *visão/vista*. Whereas in English both everyday and technical terminology has been focused on the neutral word *face*, the Romance languages developed the two rival terms, differentiating between distinct varieties of usage and constituting a great number of locutions which – as always in idiomatics – show the stages of language development.

In order to illustrate this, I would like to focus on the central-Romance languages: within Italian, for instance, *faccia* is the semantically more extensive term; it is more often used in everyday language denoting the optical side of the facial expression (*faccia a faccia*). Expressions like *una bella* or *brutta faccia* only relate to the look of the face in terms of an aesthetic evaluation and are in semantic contrast to the figurative *bella* or *brutta figura*. *Faccia* is thus the concrete semantic unity, at the same time also a rather expressive colloquial term (*alla faccia mia*, *faccia tosta...*). For a more polished style or even for technical terminology (for instance, in cosmetics or art), it is replaced by *viso*, which is therefore connotatively different. Concerning French, I have already explained the

metonymic replacement of the traditional word *face* (*face à face*; *en face de*, etc.) through *figure* (see above). The phonetically shortened word *vis* today appears only in locutions such as *vis-à-vis*. In order to avoid the rather frequent French *homonymie gênante*, *vis* was replaced by the longer term *visage*, which has the highest semantic expansion from general to technical vocabulary (and is known in German as a foreign, depreciating word).¹¹ However, we are not dealing further with the ramification of the semantic field of Latin VISUM. What is more interesting here is how the Romance languages react to the English terminology which is constituted within the area of the sociopsychological theories of *face*. Is it Ital. *faccia*, *viso* or *figura*, Fr. *face*, *visage* or *figure*, Span. *faz*, *figura* or *cara*, Port. *face* or *visão* ... and others? Or is the term *face* simply conserved as a scientific notion that is about to infiltrate common language use?

We should look at this question by finding out how both *face* and *figura* are treated in Italian. Today, the locutions *salvare la faccia* / *perdere la faccia* can be found in every dictionary.¹² Without taking into account the scientific usage based on Goffman, where it would logically be a literal translation from English, the idiom (in the lemma marked with fig.= figurative) can be considered as a rather common and often used expression. In fact, “Espressioni come *perdere o salvare la faccia* sono presenti in misura significativa in molte lingue: ne risulta una sorta di mappa antro-po-geografica” (Lurati 2001: 285). But when paraphrasing the two idiomatic expressions Lurati makes a difference: “*salvare la faccia*” is explained as “salvare le apparenze”, “*perdere la faccia*”, on the contrary, as “*fare una brutta figura*” (2001: 285), viz. *faccia* and *figura* seem to be correspondents only in the negative domain. Is this an occurrence

¹¹ The Ibero-Romance languages also use the Greek word CARA within the semantic field and marginalise *faz/face*, both do not have the same semantics.

¹² N.B. Fr. also *perdre la face/sauver la face*, Port. *salvar a face*, but Span. *salvar la cara*.

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of translation or a necessary distinction? Further discussion is needed, leading us into the theoretical discourse around *face*.

Both lexicography and the different branches of *face* theory¹³ assume that the term *face* – as Lurati states in 2001: 285 – is a fitting metaphor for the “microcosmo delle specificità individuali”. Automatically present in every communicative encounter, it is performed and negotiated. In contrast to the more static perception of *figura*, as in the bodily appearance and impression of a singular person, *face* is a dynamic and complex term which comes into being as a verbal and non-verbal *patrimonio comunicativo* and thus is only realised in interaction with others. Whereas *figura* is a (socially learned) individual thing which can also stand on its own depending on context, *face* is constituted in relation to others and is newly created over and over again in interactions. *Figura*, namely the ‘good *figura*’, is perceived by the other as an exterior quality and can thus be evaluated according to esthetical or sociological criterions. *Face*, on the contrary, is completely dependent on the other; it is created through the other who as well is engaged to actively put his proper *face* into the ongoing interaction. This means that *face* is above all a reflexive term, including a claim to reciprocity. Basically, it is considered as an anthropologically universal core concept; the problem lies in its different symbolic realisation, which derives from its culturally distinct interpretations.

Going back to the origin of the term *face* in its metaphorical sense, we are again confronted with both the conception of *face* and the conception of *figura*. Research agrees that it derived from the Chinese and was then taken over by the different languages. There is no real proof of this, but the formal congruency of the idiomatic expressions *lose/save face* which exist in most languages gives reasons to assume this common descent. There is again the striking

¹³ Cf. the English Wikipedia entry on *face negotiation theory*.

fact that the negative expression can be traced back longer than the positive one. According to Lurati, the expression *to lose face* as the verbal statement of the fear of being socially punished and isolated already existed in the 19th century in all Romance languages. The positive counterpart *to save face* presumably came into our consciousness only with the advent of sociopsychological theories. It seems to be a fact that Goffman and the translation of his works enormously added to spreading the concept to represent social order in an iconically transparent way and thus quickly crept into everyday life and societal-political discourse. It is certainly English that can be seen as the vehicle language for this transmission. However, the term *face* is, also in English, only a makeshift translation of a far more complex social metaphor, which can already be traced back to the 4th century BC within the Asian tradition.

Following the anthropologist Hu (1944), who wrote the very first study on the term *face* (and is therefore quoted in all research on *face* as, for instance, in Ting-Toomey 1994), the line goes back to the Chinese, where two different *face* terms exist: *lien* and *mien-tzu*. In Morisaki/Gudykunst, we find the following definitions: *Lien* "refers to the confidence of society in the moral character of ego" (1994: 49), this means, according to Lurati, "il prestigio che un individuo riesce ad acquisire con i propri sforzi" (2001: 286); "*mien-tzu*" refers to the social prestige which involves a reputation achieved through getting on in life, through success and ostentation"; according to Lurati (ibid.) *mien-tzu* "indica il rispetto del gruppo per un uomo [sic] che ha una buona reputazione morale, che assolve a tutti gli obblighi senza curarsi della fatica che ciò comporta". The definitions deliberately distinguish a more static from a more dynamic concept and thus come near to the dichotomy between *figura* and *face*. The first term *lien* has a more individual dimension resulting from the personality, the second a more social dimension based on the judgement of the other and hence of

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the collective. As we know, the Asian self-concept is entirely determined through the group and the position of the individual within the group. This position needs to be constantly renegotiated and confirmed. Perhaps this explains why the concept of *face* developed accurately within Chinese culture. It also explains the blending of these two terms into a hybrid metaphor in which, nevertheless, the aspect of social relation is the major one emphasising the communicative character, and it becomes still more apparent in the goal-oriented idioms such as *to lose/save face*. "Loss of *lien* puts ego out of decent human beings and security (...); it entails not only the condemnation of society, but the loss of its confidence in the integrity of ego's characters" (Hu 1944: 61). Thus, this collective loss of trust which, especially within the group-oriented Chinese culture, has the most horrible results for the development and acceptance of one's personality must be constantly avoided. The fact that people are careful to act according to the social norms turns out to be the principle of everyday interaction: worded as an idiomatic maxim it affects other cultures progressively. Ho later states more exactly: "*Face* is never a purely individual thing. It does not make sense to speak of the *face* of an individual as something lodged within his/her person; it is meaningful only when his/her face is considered in relation to that of others in the social network" (1976: 882), meaning that *face* would without doubt be "a sociological, rather than psychological construct" (1976: 876). In contrast to *figura*, which is simply oriented to a delightening self-representation regardless of the instantaneous environment's reactions, *face* always needs the communication partner as a 'sounding board', viz. it can only constitute itself through the mutual system of turns where it is constantly negotiated and reshaped. A *bella* or *brutta figura* can be assumed without being confirmed, harmed, destroyed or rebuilt, degraded or even without being realised at all. This is completely different to the concept of *face*: its *conditio sine qua non* is an ongoing

communication. The term *figura* appears to be both person- and culture-related, whereas the term *face* is merely interpersonal and – as literature propagates – it is supposed to be universal, it applies independently of culture. But is this really the case?

4. From *face* to *face work* and back – or: from the idea to a phenomenology

With these arguments, we have reached the theoretical framework around the concept of *face* and try to pick up its most important assumptions in order to distinguish it again from the concept of *figura*. As a construal to explain social performance in general, *face* is a key concept of post-modern societal theories. The potential to be empirically observed turned it into the field of linguistic pragmatics where it passed to one of its main frameworks. Unlike the vague notion of *figura*, *face* is a twofold concept: it has a hypothetical inner side, which is assumed to be oriented towards certain values, and a concrete symbolically manifested outer side, which shows itself in the social encounter. Symbolicity, semioticity and rituality are thus the basic qualities of *face*, which possibly should be both described and assessed with the help of certain parameters. Language plays a central role here. It is the symbolic surface which perceivably reflects and transports both the anthropological conditions and the culture-specific interpretations of *face*. The sticking point for the essentially phenomenological character of *face* is thus the materialistic transformation of an ideal construct and its ascribed attributes into *face wants* that appear in communication. Inasmuch as every individual acquires such wants through socialisation on the filter of the cultural community, these are constantly displayed in the symbolic forms, turning social interaction

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into a ritual process of their mutual satisfaction. All moves which symbolically fulfil these claims are rightly called *face work* in research literature. With *face work*, a notion is born which, in its mainly verbal nature, bridges pragmatics and linguistics.

As the maintenance of face is the most essential condition for successful social interaction, *face work* is realised by a range of positive relational acts that, in the respective communicative situation, are considered the most convenient strategies. We know that Goffman exclusively sees in *face* a "sacred thing", requiring continuous respect and recognition. Thus, the notion of *face* deliberately includes a performative character where players – just as in the theatre – are 'performing' exact dramaturgical roles and respect stage directions in order to be perceived, accepted and applauded by spectators. With regard to the basic social code, which Goffman divides into the *rules of self-respect* and the *rules of considerateness* (Goffman 1967: 9 and 10), we are concerned with symbolic practices that are staged above all when a threat or damage to *face* is imminent – when and how this is the case in the performance, depends on the respective peripetia. The way in which this can be communicatively managed is culture-specific: "Facework serves to counteract "incidents" – that is events whose effective symbolic implications threaten *face*" (Goffman 1967: 12); to remain in the theatre metaphor, when tension or friction arise, it needs skilful reaction and solution. This is the issue where *face theories* are constituted opening up two different areas of research: pragmatic *politeness theory*, on the one hand, and sociopsychological *face negotiation theory*, on the other. Both see their ground basically in constituting a framework for interactive conflict management and have consequences for intercultural communication.

In the linguistic context, *politeness theory* has caused such waves since the *pragmatic turn* that the connection between *politeness*, *face* and *face work* is beyond doubt. *Face work*, however, is the linking

notion. To return to O'Driscoll (see above), *doing politeness* may always be understood as a situationally appropriate *face work* which responds to the respective *face*-needs of the interactants.

At least Brown and Levinson, the pioneers of the *politeness paradigm*, use this as the starting point for their *politeness theory*: by interpreting *face* as a dichotomy of "basic wants" which are commonly claimed by every rationally socialised member of a community, it manifests itself by a related dichotomy of interactional strategies. To give these strategies a pragmatic ground, there is another methodological restraint. Mostly linked to the accomplishment of the famous *face-threatening acts* (FTA) which have normally to be mitigated, these strategies appear frequently and can thus be observed and functionally classified. The dichotomy of this constructivist, but highly explanatory approach, can be traced back without doubt to the polarity between *face-saving* vs. *face-losing*. But based on Durkheim's distinction between positive and negative rites, *face* was metaphorically split into a positive and a negative part, i.e. on the one hand, it covers the desire for attention and acceptance (*positive face*), and, on the other, the need for territorial freedom and protection (*negative face*). Thus, *face* turns out to be a ritual constraint of claims to which a range of verbal strategies is commonly responding – namely if the execution of an FTA is not avoidable. In order to soften the "dangerous" illocutionary force of these acts, *redressive action* has to be put on stage. It consists in a clever and situationally appropriate verbal modification by answering the two face-wants respectively with correlated strategies, viz. *positive politeness* vs. *negative politeness*. This is nothing but a very short summary of the model the two pioneers of the Grice-Goffman paradigm have initiated in order to explain the construction of *face* and its communicative, namely verbal outcome.

It is, however, the criticism of the model which leads us back to our problem, viz. the distinction between *face* and *figura* and the

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evaluation of *face work* as a *bella* or *brutta figura* in the Schettino corpus. Primarily, our concern is the unclear equation of *face work* and *politeness* based on mixing *politeness*₁ as a historically and culturally coined lay concept and *politeness*₂ as an anthropologically universal theoretical category (Held 2011; Thaler 2010 and 2011). What makes the Italian behaviour so polite or impolite when defending their *figura* concept? And can we in this case operate with *(im)-politeness*? What kind of behaviour leads us to the impression that *brutta figura* is predominant in conducting the internet dispute? Or, do the Italian users rather lose their *face* by attacking the Germans with all kinds of national stereotypes, even putting Second World War crimes into play? What are the – right and the wrong – *face work*-strategies in this collective self-defence? Further points of criticism of the *politeness* paradigm (cf. Held 2011) must be considered in order to separate the three concepts from one another and to put them into concrete form, especially in their application to CMC and the problems with which we are concerned in the Schettino corpus.

On the one hand, there is the tendency to ethnocentric interpretation (in my case the “German” view) of the controversy over the Italian self-image which leads to a relative evaluation of the frequent aggressive and offensive actions as effectively face-threatening, especially in the forms as they appear in Italian language. On the other hand, this ties in with the whole question of categorising verbal actions as polite vs. impolite, taking into account that – according to Watts 1998 and 2003 – the whole area of *politic behaviour* lies in between, that is to say, a neutral, essentially expected co-operational behaviour, the so-called *supportive face work* (cf. Watts 2003: 117-141). Keeping *face work* and *politeness* apart (and thus, above all, apart from the repertoire of politeness formulae, which every historical language has specifically developed) is Watts’ great achievement and basically introduces a change of

paradigm: *face work* is extended to the processes of “*relational work*” (Locher/Watts 2005), no longer merely serving only the “mitigation of face-threatening acts” (2005: 10), but comprising “the entire continuum of verbal behaviour from direct, impolite, rude or aggressive interaction through to polite interaction, encompassing both appropriate and inappropriate forms of social behaviour” (Locher 2004: 51). Although, in this postmodern turn, the basic orientation is still directed towards communicative cooperation and conflict avoidance; being seen as current normality introduces new perspectives.

Firstly, we find out that the existence of politeness is purely a matter of interpretation by the respective listener and thus – according to Watts – a matter of intentionally ‘marked’ *supportive face work*, i.e. “efforts made by the participants (...) to be as considerate towards one another as possible” (Watts 2003: 277). These efforts are more than the just usual, socioculturally expected *politic behaviour*: “Facework ... consists partly, although by no means totally, of utterances that are open to interpretation as ‘polite’. The problem is that politeness, which ... is equivalent to giving more than required by the expected politic behaviour, may be evaluated positively or negatively.” (Watts 2003: 130). Watts thus removes the commonly practised forms out of their “semantic-functional” meaning to successfully make the changeover to the – listener-oriented – context sensitivity of the interpretative paradigm.

Secondly, Watts’ and Locher’s view brings with it an opening to the hardly considered area of *impoliteness*, impoliteness as the opposite pole on the broadly ranging *face work* scale. From this moment on, research pays attention to “negatively marked behaviour” by studying various “situationally inappropriate” strategies which, nevertheless, have exactly to be distinguished from

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the areas of *non-polite* and *over-polite*.¹⁴ This results in many, partly unsolved, functional issues, which may be relevant in the aggressively composed Schettino corpus.

The simple assumption that *fare una ...figura* may be related to *face work* and, in particular, *fare bella figura* to politeness is thus no longer valid. However, Watts' argument is always based on direct interaction situations, which do not exist in this form in internet communication and so lead us to further considerations. As online forums do not always follow a sequential development where the participants react immediately to the contributions, there is no real check point for classifying the contributions as polite or impolite within the ongoing discourse. In addition, postings on the internet also have a public side, which means that uninvolved users follow like an audience turning every contribution into an item addressed to an undefined plurality of persons. Nevertheless, even here, there are certain rules of performance to be respected. These lines, known as netiquette, are supposed to be in relation with *politic behaviour* and not with *politeness*. Thus, in internet interaction the point of reference is no longer the reflexive "counter *face*" of a specific recipient, but rather the hypothesised judgement of many anonymous co-users, so that there is little loss of self at stake. It is more a matter of acceptance or rejection in the community, and thus we argue that, in internet communication, it is more the *figura* principle which matters and not the ethical principles of politeness.

Watts' well-argued suggestion of the basic congruity of *face work* to *perceived supportive work*, a result of "involving the reciprocal social

¹⁴ The discussion of *impoliteness* under application of the *politeness paradigm* is currently en vogue. Many studies focus so deeply on this – opposing? – phenomenon that it is possible to talk of an "impoliteness turn" (cf. Culpeper 1996 and 2011; Bousfield 2008; Bousfield/Locher 2008). It is striking that more recent titles which go into the *politeness paradigm* always look at both sides and mark this with bracketing (*Im*)*politeness*. Cf. for instance, Culpeper/Kadar 2011.

attribution of face to the participants ... in accordance with the lines the participants can be assumed to be taking in the interactions" (Watts 2003: 131), is therefore preferable for the analysis of an internet forum. Not only does it lead us back to Goffman's fundamental concept of *face*, but it also provides the connection to a general social-anthropological view of *face* in an interdisciplinary context. Inasmuch as *face work* is no longer just "counteraction to face-threatening incidents" (Goffman 1967), it symbolically represents any *face* as a *conditio humana sine qua non*. The resulting paradox, "no facework without face" (Ting-Toomey/Cocroft 1994: 308), leads us to deduce the following conclusion: no face work without social interaction, viz. no face without interaction. That means that *face* belongs to the very essentials of sociality per se. Every interaction thus reflects the biographically developed needs and the cognitive and emotional claims individuals have interiorised as their proper personality – they are automatically reproduced in social interaction, no matter when, in which medium or in which situation. Any communication is thus an encounter of faces and therefore ubiquitous *face work*. The questions are only whether and in which way it comes out in language, and under which constellations of relationship it is mutually negotiated, destroyed or confirmed. *Face* is thus universal as an ideal conception, but, in reality, it is coded as frame-based and thus is expressed in different forms, mostly in language. It is up to linguistics not only to identify the "tangible" cues of *face* in the various communicative acts, but also to examine and measure their functions and merits in the situational setting. *Face-theory* as a cultural and social science provides a more extensive view on our subject and is supposed to be more appropriate for the analysis of its complexity as it comes out in an internet forum:

Face is an intoxicating metaphor that connects communication with social life. It is a multifaceted construct that takes on dimensions of identity issues, social cognitive issues, affective

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issues and communication issues. (Ting-Toomey/Cocroft 1994: 307)

Face entails the presentation of a civilized front to another individual within the webs of interconnected relationships in a particular culture. (...) It is a metaphor for the claimed sense of self-respect in an interactivity situation. It has been viewed alternatively as a symbolic resource, as social status, as a projected identity issue, and as a fundamental communication phenomenon. (Ting-Toomey 1994: 1)

and therefore:

Facework involves the enactment of face strategies, verbal and non-verbal moves, self-presentation acts, and impression management interaction. (ibid.)

With these quotations, it becomes clear that *face* as well as *face work* concern every sort of social act on all symbolic levels; thus, every contribution to the internet forum, no matter how aggressive and offensive it may be, transports and constitutes *faces*. As culture-influenced knowledge made up of expectations, wants and sensibilities, *face* unconsciously shapes and reflects the respective personality, first appearing in the interaction with others as mutually shared – and strategically performed – ‘work’. According to O’Driscoll 1996, we can say that *face* is the *background consciousness* which is ‘foregrounded’ only in communication, viz. self comes out only in front of the other. And the more so when it is under threat, when there are imminent clashes to be at stake. *Face* and accordingly *face work* are thus purely relational constructs, flexible and dynamic and, above all, reflexive. Mutuality and *co-orientation* are thus the operative points for our argumentation: disturbed or damaged mutuality of expectations and needs causes conflict; different attitudes to certain topics and values can collide. It all depends on how much common ground there is and how cooperatively differences are approached and negotiated.

The *face negotiation theories* provide a different view: they attribute the functioning of communicative mutuality to the concept of culture: in opposition to Brown's and Levinson's universal credo, *face* – both its value and its maintenance – is a decidedly culturally-influenced form of identity. It is, above all, challenged in intercultural communication and thus has to assert itself, or defend itself mainly in these kinds of encounters. Ting-Toomey, the protagonist of this theory, anchors this 'culturality' in five *thematic clusters*, which have to be mutually 'understood' and symbolically accounted in every interactive confrontation, viz. in *face concerns*, *face moves*, *face work interaction strategies*, *conflict communication styles*, and *face content domains* (Ting-Toomey 2005: 74). All of these five areas are differently transported and realised according to the culture type, whereby the following influences are significant: topic, communicative relationship and personal self-image (*identity*). The communicative negotiation of these influences may differ considerably according to whether the self-image of a culture is more directed to the single individual or to the group or collective (i.e. *independence* cultures vs. *interdependence* cultures). The complex taxonomy of outcomes and the differentiated proportional matrix derived from that taxonomy cannot be further described here (Ting-Toomey 2005).

Nevertheless, it is elementary to this culture-based model of *face work* that the content of all its categories has much to do with conflict solution (*prevention – restoration*). We therefore find many *strategies*, *content domains* and *styles* listed that were identified by Brown/Levinson¹⁵ as verbal politeness; rightly going well beyond the language level and equally involving topic, function and mental structures. In complete contrast to *politeness theory* and more appropriate for our argumentation, the focus is on the concept of

¹⁵ One of the central points of criticism of Brown and Levinson's pioneering work is the *fuzziness* of their *politeness* strategies, where formal and functional criteria are mingled.

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identity, the *Self*, as the motor of all communication and thus the provider – automatically or intentionally – of every kind of *face work*. If *face* is defined as “an identity boundary phenomenon” (Ting-Toomey 1994: 2) or directly as “self-identity through which communicators order their social world” (idem 1994: 3), then, in my opinion, the individual as formed by his or her cultural and social experience stands in the foreground. He or she is the actively negotiating personality, which re-recognises itself again and again through the channel of the other. In complete contrast to *politeness theory*,¹⁶ where all actions are oriented towards the other and the satisfaction of his or her needs, in Ting-Toomey’s theory it is the account of self that always has priority. Every interactive encounter therefore centres on prior-ranking *self-concern*; just the latter is open to negotiation – it is to be confirmed or destroyed (viz. the *identity claim*, Ting-Toomey 1994: 326).

With the sociopsychological concept of *identity*, and the much older and broader construct than *face*, whose clarification in the rather diverse literature would go too far here,¹⁷ another aspect that is in turn important for our investigations comes into view. As an object of negotiation, identity is something generally human, but it is acquired and formed culturally and therefore assumes different facets as a result of different valuations. Basically, we are talking of subjectivity that developed during socialisation, displaying a self-image (*Selbstbild*) in the form of dignity, honour and self-esteem. Inasmuch as it takes on a certain profile by being perceived by others (*Fremdbild*), we can conclude that identity, in communication, is fundamentally *projected identity*.¹⁸

¹⁶ Cf. Cheng’s critical remarks 2001, where he notes “the neglect of self” in *politeness theory*.

¹⁷ Cf. Spencer-Oatey 2007 for an insight into the plentiful literature on identity.

¹⁸ Consider for a moment Mead’s dichotomy of the *I* versus *me* and also the theory of the “generalized other” in Symbolic Interactionism.

Taking into account two completely different dimensions of culture – the individualistic vs. the collectivistic – two completely different identity claims develop: *independent self-construction* vs. *dependent self-construction*. One deliberately supports “*individual identity* where the recognition of self is based on personal achievements and the self-actualisation process”, the other is bound more to *group identity*, where “the recognition of self is based on ascribed status, role relationships, family dependences and/or workgroup reputation” (Ting-Toomey/Cocroft 1994: 314). Further, three *face* types result from this cultural dualism,¹⁹ i.e. the self-satisfying *autonomy face*; the group-dependent *fellowship face*, and in between, the *competence face* relying on individual efforts successfully striving for the recognition of a group (cf. Domenici/Littlejohn 2006: 14ff.). According to interactive relationship and context, different *self-images* are constituted varying their attributes and the degrees of influence.

How the general concept of identity, finally, can be put into an analytical connection with *face* is shown gainfully by the work of Spencer-Oatey. For her (cf. Spencer-Oatey 2007), *face work* is continuous, but situation-bound *self-identity management*. While *identity* is considered to be a fixed factor, *face* is, in contrast, the interactive development of self on the base of attributes “perceived as being ascribed by others” (Spencer-Oatey 2007: 644). It is therefore always – as we have already stated – a relational, dynamic concept. Hence, *face* analyses go considerably further than language data and can only be done in an interdisciplinary way with special reference to psychological and sociopedagogical approaches (‘theories of identity’), whereby the tension between individual and group is of essential importance. For Spencer-Oatey, there is, however, a hinge between the two sides of the identity definition:

¹⁹ Here, too, see the broadly based research especially centred round Geert Hofstede.

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that is the momentary communicative relationship, where the personal locating is actually formed and is as such symbolically externalised as the specific *sensitivity* for the approved social values: there thus arises the so-called *identity face* as the result of the *relational practices* in the ongoing communication. In the word formation *identity face*, a reflex for the tension between *personal face* and *community face* can be noticed; it is this tension which every one of us has to overcome in the communication process, thus forming his or her current self-image.²⁰

In tying together both *face* paradigms (with Spencer-Oatey 2007: 654), the sociopragmatic and the sociocultural, we can retain the following polarities which make a further and concrete definition of *face* nearly impossible:

Face is a multi-faceted phenomenon, yet it can also be a unitary concept; Face has cognitive foundations and yet it is also socially constituted in interaction; Face belongs to individuals and to collectives, and yet it also applies to interpersonal relations.

Thus, *face* is supposed to be 'everything' that happens in communication. Within these theoretical remarks, *face* has been revealed in its complex, even contradictory nature which makes any further explanation impossible.

The question remains whether the concept of *face* is interchangeable with that of *figura*, e.g. trying to replace the term *face* in the above quotations with the term *figura*. Are all the characteristics of *face* Spencer-Oatey mentions also true of *figura*? In this case, the ultimate answer is supposed to be 'yes'. The real differences are more in the details and concern the effective interactive realisation.

²⁰ Spencer-Oatey 2007: 650f. explains which social values can be communicated with the self-image, using the values scale of the psychologist Schwartz, who distinguishes four poles: *openness to change* (*stimulation, self-direction*) v. *conservatism* (*conformity, security, tradition*), on the one hand, and *self-enhancement* (*power, achievement*) v. *self-transcendence* (*integrity, universalism, benevolence*), on the other.

Therefore, we try to convey our arguments briefly to the Schettino corpus.

5. *Figura* versus *face* – or remarks on the construction of identity in the online forum

The attempt to trace *face*, or *figura*, in a medium which is in itself defined as *faceless* and *body-less* (Herring 2003) appears contradictory. However, that this paradox is extremely challenging considering the relation between *figura* and *face*, is going to be shown by clarifying the Schettino corpus in its media-dependent, discursive and social specifics. Applying them to virtual data, the two concepts offer a more distinct functional profile, so that we can conclude our remarks with a schematic comparison.

5.1. The technological, media-related dimension

The most fundamental – and, at the same time, indeed the most contradictory – reference point for the analysis is the fact that internet communication is considered as a virtual and basically anonymous meeting of people, whose contributions appear on the screen as writing-based text chunks in an asynchronous order. In this “appearing” lies the opportunity to suspend the material de-personification by literally ‘visualizing’ the users, undefined in space and time, by symbolic means. Whatever reasons and topics there are, virtual meetings are always primarily a matter of discursive re-creation of “personal” presence (cf. Bays 1998). This happens exclusively as a text and therefore predominantly through language. Thus, we may assume that identities are visually “embodied” through the purely language-based performance on the

screen. That is why we pretend that the two concepts *face* and *figura* should be in language-data re-traceable.²¹

Internet forums, where users give an opinion in diverse *postings* on a common topic (so-called “*have your say sections*”, cf. Neurauter-Kessels 2011: 195), are therefore the appropriate marketplace for us to observe language acts and modalities which primarily serve the presentation of an adequate self-image. Against the background of a narcissistic performance culture, this still has to be the most positive possible: thus language (and the special phonic and iconic code, e.g. the range of emoticons) conveys social competences (*face*) as well as physiological ideals (*figura*). We may therefore assume that, in public interactions, the manifestation of a *bella figura* is normal, quasi a matter of honour: it stands for the modern self-consciousness and self-confidence and is reflected in handling the topic and the style of the utterance. Among the like-minded community, one is generally intent on permanent, reciprocal *impression management*, re-creating “in written form” a new ego identity between *in-group* and *out-group*, which Spencer-Oatey (see above) describes as the respective *situated* or *frame-based identity face*, typical of the Social Media. I would go so far as to distinguish *figura* media (like Facebook, Twitter, etc.) from *face* media (like chat, mail, etc.) and to link not only certain formats and text types with them, but also certain semiotic and language strategies. Discussion platforms are, in my opinion, somewhere in between – they have a performative and interactive character, i.e. they are just as intent on the ostentatious demonstration of a public self-image as on a smooth dyadic communication among the partici-

²¹ The fact that *Social Media* are an adequate platform for *self-presentation* where users employ strategies connected to *face* and *figura* which, for researchers, are easy to follow on the screen, is testified – in my opinion – by the metaphorical denomination *facebook*. As the worldwide market leader of Social Media it thus is the best ambassador for what Foucault (cf. Luther et al. 1988) denounces as the pernicious “technologies of the self”.

pants. According to the anonymity, *face* as the "real life" identity is not at stake, because less importance is attached to the reciprocal *turn*-taking than to the successful negotiation of a common matter in front of a public audience. The visible *face work* is therefore to be valued less from the aspect of the ongoing interaction between socially conscious users than from the viewpoint of a hypothesised "audience" and the "staging efficiency". I thus dare to state that in such forums *figura* plays a stronger role than *face*, or rather: that *relational face* takes second place behind the tension between *individual face* and *social face*.

5.2. The discursive dimension

The Schettino corpus, which not only deployed the theoretical discussion of the conceptual rivalry between *figura* and *face*, but is also intended to provide the empirical basis for their performance in language, represents one of the many current discussion platforms in online media in which people comment on certain up-to-the-minute topics of a sociopolitical nature. The triggers are mostly editorial contributions, above all openly held journalistic opinions in personally signed articles. The *postings*, enthusiastic reactions of the online readers, a regular user group with a certain standard of education and political interest, are directed in differing frequency and degree of importance towards several addressees – on the one hand, directly towards the respective author of an article and his or her opinion that is presented there, on the other hand, as a dialogue with clear references to the co-arguing partners in communication, and, finally, indirectly towards the general public, or the silently "observing" participants in the forum.²² Forums thus support not only interpersonal contact but also the public

²² Cf. also, Burger's division into effective and intended recipients (Burger 2005: 8).

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‘exhibition’ of representative opinions and have developed certain behaviour guidelines in this respect – the so-called netiquette.

In our case, the starting point of the media dispute is – as initially described – the column in SPIEGEL-Online (S.P.O.N. “Der schwarze Kanal”), in which the irresponsible behaviour of the fugitive Captain Schettino of the sinking Costa Concordia was supposed to be connected metaphorically to the sinking European currency. However, through the introductory straining of the *figura* cliché, the collective self-image of the Italians was bruised in a politically incorrect way: the improvident use of the principle “one for all” in this tragic case has set off a flood of angry defensive reactions. My concerns are an analysis of the furious Italian feedbacks and thus of both the thematic negotiation and the language performance of the *figura* concept as a symbol of national identity. For this goal I have chosen the platform *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, where, directly after the publication of the SPIEGEL column and the subsequent protest letter from the ambassador, a commentary entitled “*Gli Schettino d’Italia e la credibilità persa*” (= The Italian Schettinos and the lost credibility) appeared, provoking 298 *postings* within 3-4 days (i.e. 24-28 Jan., 2012). The entries appear under pseudonyms with no picture; most are single contributions, others refer to one another, whereby there is no coherent sequence because of the medium-typical asynchronicity (Herring talks of the common “*interrupted adjacency*” in internet forums, cf. 2003; internet printout p.6). Coherence is additionally made more difficult, because, in over-running a certain length, the entries are shown fragmentarily on the display and can only be seen completely by pressing the *show more* button. The posters can mutually “like” one another – as is usual in forums – or answer one another spontaneously. As the discussion escalated more and more after the use of the equation “*Schettino vs. Auschwitz*” (see above), the reactions on the internet went out of control; Italian and German internet sites are full of

them. I limit myself here to the quoted Italian platform deliberately approaching a discourse which offers not only a good comparable database to work with the construction of self in contrast to other, but can also further be used to explain current European ethno-stereotypes.

From a discursive point of view, it must be noted that the selected corpus represents a very complex and decidedly heated, emotional debate on the Italian national self-image. It is striking that the controversy arose and has developed by mirroring their own self-image against how it is seen by the Germans and thus is a result of the friction of the cognitive, emotional and cultural denotations and connotations a historically developed image construction implies: pro and contra collide respectively in regard to Italians and Germans; offensive and defensive actions alternate, are realised as preferred, mostly, however, as dispreferred sequences, whereby acceptance and refusal hold the balance – and all that happens exclusively by wording. *Postings* are writing-based text chunks of different, in our case certainly, of considerable length displaying syntactic cohesion and complexity. As we can see in a first overview, there is the distance style predominating, i.e. in opposition to typical *netspeak*, which is often a rudimentary written reflection of spoken language, we find well-formulated sentences, explicit statements and performative elements; further thematic and dialogical references, a wide variation of language with striking directness and an eschewal of the so-called “compensation symbols” (as Köhler 2003 calls the inventory of onomatopoeia and emoticons). In the search for identity markers – or better: for evidence of *face* or *figura* – we are therefore likely to concentrate on language coding, that means that we try to trace the two concepts in the structures and forms of the written text chunks that appear on the screen.

5.3. The social dimension

One of the most important characteristic of CMC is that the real identity of the user remains hidden behind the anonymity, or the lack of material embodiment. Therefore, the usual fear of losing face as it happens in direct interaction as well as the constituting and handling of improper power relations no longer apply; internet communication mostly proceeds in a symmetrical and democratic way, and thus thoughtlessly establishes nearness and confidentiality. Accordingly, it is difficult to discern the respective real *faces* in their approximate demographic identity and ideology, even if speech acts, language style and language choice give us some indication. Being primarily markers of presence in the case of many contributions, we can largely say whether they transport a good or bad *figura*. For a deeper analysis, it is decisive to develop a method which filters social identities clearly out of the cognitive and emotional dealing with the topic. We need findings on how affiliations are defined between individuality, groups and the collective and how common ground is established or destroyed. The way of formulating opinions and value judgements is essential here, but also the discursive re-production of the respective situational *frames*.

In our case, a conflict community develops which in positive and negative acts – *given and given off* – blows up a national stereotype into a massive row and works it off defensively against the image of the other. On the basis of the theory of social cognition, the use of national stereotypes – as a form of racism – belongs to so-called “emotion-driven hot cognitions” (Langlotz 2010: 168), i.e.

phenomena ... closely related to overrated and biased concepts of one's own positive and superior characteristics, while constructing a stereotypical, denigrating, and weak concept of the other. [...] Moreover, such negative stereotypes are usually

coupled with false beliefs, negative motivations and affect.
(ibid.)

The debate on a “hot” concept like *figura* determines the communicative roles and momentary relationships between the individual and the group, more specifically in four dimensions: *self-concept* versus *other-concept* / *in-group identity* versus *out-group identity* (Langlotz 2010: 173). *Face work* thus can be judged towards what kind of identity construction it is directed. In our corpus, the collaborative reconstruction and rehabilitation of a collective group identity supposedly destroyed by the *out-group* stands in the foreground: the posters’ self-image is a part of it. As the *out-group identity*, viz. the Germans, represent for the Italians a historically conveyed ‘enemy image’ (*Feindbild*’, cf. Heitmann 2003), it is stylised into the common point of attack without any critical consciousness: by ascribing stereotypical attributes and by exaggerating negative evaluations a good self-image is not only proportionally reflected through the contrast with the other-image, but it is also going to be confirmed, strengthened and more highly valued. Many utterances are made thoughtlessly and without redressive action, thus, politeness principles and conversation norms are no longer kept, and etiquette seems to be completely contradicted (cf. the distinction between *impoliteness* and *rudeness*, cf. Bousfield 2008). However, the guidelines of netiquette are respected inasmuch as the posters pursue a common aim and negotiate this cooperatively. Thus, aggression or the insulting of an absent opponent can be executed if it is within the consensus of a user group, and above all if it serves the defence of the self in the in-group against the out-group. Hence, in this furious Italian forum community we are witnesses to the language construction of an *identity face*, which puts collective identity before individual identity and risks (inter)relational identity by not respecting the needs of *face* and the necessary adherence to appropriate forms of social behaviour. What is seen from the outside as *brutta figura*

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reveals itself from the inside as an efficient means of collective self-defence to save the common social concept of the quasi “holy” national *figura* (for a definition of *social concept*, cf. Langlotz 2010).

Nevertheless, if the performed act is dispreferred, viz. deviating from the expected norm, it supposedly tells us still more about the personal contours of the posters – such as their level of education, social status, culture and vocation, etc. – than it would do being preferred, viz. conciliatory and norm-conforming. The assessment of a good or bad *figura*, which hereby comes into existence, will be evaluated differently, according to whether it is made by the forum participants or the public readership, and then, once again, whether it is made by the defended *in-group* or the insulted *out-group*. Nevertheless, *bella figura* is still to be seen when *face* comes out in a compensatory, conciliatory language behaviour oriented towards harmony and balance. In the Schettino corpus, verbal aggression dominates, so that a *brutta figura* clearly rebounds onto the Italians. But, because the direct access to the communication is missing, we cannot speak of impoliteness, but certainly of misplaced emotionality and a shocking lack of education that damages the collective, not the individual reputation. Hence, we are in front of a collective face loss.

What can we deduce from these media-related reflections?

- Social Media can be defined as exclusively text-based channels, where interacting identities can be studied namely in language. As their main function is the sociocognitive re-creation and co-construction of social presence, we can suppose that in the text chunks *faces* are coming out by performing a good or a bad *figura*.
- Social Media are comparable to market places where people meet regularly with the aim of confirming their relationship and creating new ones. They are thus textually performed socialites, where both normative conventions and group-specific

or individual identities are reflected in meta-linguistic remarks as well as in language expressions and styles.

But there are two different levels of communicative commitment to distinguish: the one I call the “social arena” level, the other I call the “social community” level; the first is where self-representation is dominating, the second deals with the handling of the ongoing interactional relationship. Thus, what comes out through symbolic activities in Social Media-talks is a multiple *face* or a – so-to-say – twofold identity that can be differentiated in consequence of both, communicative commitment and identity markers.

The following schemas demonstrate both and thus conclude our argumentation:

The communication levels of Social Media	
Social Arena Level	Social Community Level
external representation level ((public) audience)	internal interaction level (participants)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• primacy of self-investment and self-representation – “meforming”• lines of behaviour (netiquette)• commitment to <i>figura</i>: self on stage; demonstrative self-construction as a face of own culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• constraints of democracy – familiarity – intimacy• civic duties to community• commitment to <i>face</i>: conflict-avoiding relation management and face maintenance
↘	↙
a twofold / hybrid identity	
Multiple face!	

Table 1: Communication levels in Social Media

Presumed CMC-identity cues = signals of presence (“mewording”)	
Demonstrative part:	Interactive part:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identification through nicknames • self- and other-labelling • self-positioning devices • ascription of values • expressivity (rudeness) • performativity – theatricality • preference of dramatic narratives • group- / collective-oriented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • turn-taking • system of addressivity • metacommunicative cues • connectiveness • modalisation processes – (in)directness • use of presuppositions • respect (politeness!) • other- / relation-oriented
↓	↓
<i>figura</i>-oriented devices	<i>face</i>-oriented devices

Table 2: Identity cues between *face* and *figura*

Social Media are an ideal channel for observing and describing *face* manifestations in and through language, whereby exogenous procedures have to be distinguished from endogenous ones. The typical multiple *face* of the Social Media is due to the mixture of the two communicative commitments, the demonstrative and the interactive. Commonly co-present in CMC, the “presence”-showing of postings comprises both, me-devices oriented to the confirmation on public stage; and other-devices to keep up a smooth relational intercourse where mutual respect is the norm. We deduce from the two tables that the first group is represented by devices which are oriented to the uni-directional concept of *figura*, the second more to the interactional concept of *face*. That means for our discussion that *figura* and *face* show evident differences in the following domains: the external and internal constitution; the way of performance and relatedness; the degrees of universality vs. cul-

turality; the theoretical abstraction and the explanatory force. Hence, at the end, it seems that semantically considered *face* is a part of *figura*, whilst functionally considered *figura* is a part of *face*, viz. their relation is, after all, a mainly dialectic one.

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Claus Ehrhardt – Urbino

Politeness and Face Work in German Forum Communication

1. Introduction: Communication in New Media

Technological change in mass media has always run parallel with social, cultural and anthropological change. The Media have even been described as “historical a priori of cultures and societies”¹ (Hörisch 2005: 186). This has become particularly evident in the last few decades since the broader diffusion of the internet and the development of the so-called Web 2.0. Many scientific and non-scientific observers agree on the fact that these forms of New Media are having an important impact on the ways in which we interact with others, conceptualise our identity and see the world. Ongoing debates regarding the damage caused to children by online games, the role and rights of authors, the difference between virtual and “real” reality, artificial intelligence or the limits between private and public life, are some examples that make clear that the internet has changed many things for every user – and that it makes necessary new reflections on old problems.

One effect of the new technical potentials is the quick evolution of new forms of communication like chat rooms, blogs, Social Media or forums. They can be interpreted as indicators of many of the new features of communication in the age of the internet. Looking

¹ Original: “[...] historische Apriori von Kulturen und Gesellschaften.” Translation: C.E.

at new forms of communication, it becomes possible to analyse precisely how internet-based interaction works, what is happening there, which are the differences to offline-communication and how individuals deal with the new possibilities, but also allows us to observe the characteristics which are also present in “traditional” communication. It becomes particularly interesting to see how the mutual relationship between people and the (technical and social) context of communication is designed, if and to what degree the setting of the communication determines the behaviour of the actors, in which ways and with which communicative means speakers try to get along between the pressure to behave according to the rules of the game on one hand, and the wish to appear as an individual person in order to constitute a personal identity on the other, and how participants create, manage and maintain relationships with others.

Those questions are the frame for the present paper. Obviously it does not aim to find an answer to them. It will deal with forum discussions in a German news-website and try to analyse some linguistic strategies applied for the management of interpersonal relationships. The central concepts of the analysis will be *face* and *politeness*. Focusing on these themes, it will be possible to understand a little bit better how forum users adapt to the specific context of communication, how they present themselves and how they conceptualise their relationships with fellow users.

In the first section the key concepts will be briefly presented and discussed. The second section will be dedicated to the application of face and politeness in forums. The general conditions for constructing face and managing relationships with others in this form of communication will be considered, and the problem that arises for the present linguistic analysis will be formulated in a more precise way. In the last part, finally, some examples will be presented and discussed. Most of them deal with situations in which

users themselves reflect on face work; in this way it should be possible to give some impressions of what is considered “normal” or problematic in this form of discussion by participants, what they expect from each other in terms of face work and how they organise the communicative exchange in terms of investment in the management of self or relationship with others.

2. Face and politeness

Face – like politeness – is a word and a concept used in everyday communication as well as in scientific contexts. This has an important advantage: scientific discussion on these topics will not be very distant from real-life-problems. However, there is also a risk in using the same word in both kinds of discussions: everyday-concepts can be ambiguous and often they are – scientific notions, on the contrary, should be clearly defined and fit into a theoretic model. For politeness Watts et al. (1992) have therefore made a distinction between “first order politeness” which refers to the way in which actors in conversations use the word “polite” or “politeness” in verbal exchange on the one hand and “second order politeness” on the other. The latter means a use of the terms to refer to scientific concepts. The distinction has been taken up and deeply discussed by Eelen (2001: 30ff.). He speaks about politeness₁ and politeness₂ and describes the latter as a theory of politeness₁:

By means of such a theory we should be able to understand how politeness₁ works, what its functionality is, what it “does” for people and for society in general. (Eelen 2001: 43)

The author (2001: 31) reminds us that scientists should carefully avoid confusing the two notions and always be aware of what they are speaking about: everyday reality or scientific analysis.

The face concept can be treated in an analogous way: Here, also, one should distinguish between what we mean when we say that someone has “lost or saved his face”, or similar notions, in everyday contexts, and what we understand when we talk about face as a concept that helps us to describe and better analyse what happens when speakers communicate. So *face*₁ will be the everyday notion and *face*₂ a sociological, anthropological or linguistic concept. Clearly there should not be a broad gap between one and the other as Watts point out for the politeness-distinction: politeness₂ (and *face*₂) cannot be something completely different from the respective layer concepts used by actors in communication. Yet this, on the other hand, does not mean that theory has to abandon the field and leave it to everyday-understanding, as Watts seems to suggest when he makes his aims explicit. From his point of view a scientific work should

[...] help us find our way back to what we should be doing in the study of social interaction, that is, showing how our layer notions of social behaviour, as they are struggled over discursively by participants in social interaction, are constitutive of that behaviour [...]. (Watts 2003: 11)

However, in many cases everyday concepts are too few and not clear enough for scientific discussion. Philosophical debate cannot be based on layer notions about democracy, freedom or similar topics if it aims to analyse the themes in depth. The same thing may happen with politeness and face. Scientific debate should go beyond every-day-knowledge about the topics. First of all the concepts have to be seen in the context of a scientific model or a theory and they should guarantee the possibility of being one element of a terminology and a systematic approach (Ehrhardt 2011: 33f.). And it should, at least potentially, be general. As Watts (2003: 13ff.) recognises, however, politeness₁-terms are not: they are necessarily bound to specific languages and cultures. Considera-

tions about universal phenomena or comparisons between different cultural realities will be difficult on this ground.

What we need, therefore, when we wish to start an analysis (theoretical or empirical) about politeness and face, is a clear idea of what we are looking for. And in fact there is a scientific debate about face and the relationship between face and politeness that can be used to define the object of the investigation. It becomes relevant with Goffman who, in the context of his interactional approach to sociology and in the tradition of Durkheim, focussed on the interdependence of the individual and the social in interaction. He defines face as “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact” (Goffman 1967: 5). So face is a kind of image that actors in social encounters draw of themselves. There are five points in the definition that will be important in the following discussion:

- 1) Face is not a matter of a single person, it has to be negotiated with other actors. They can accept the speaker’s claim or force him to change something in his behaviour. For Goffman, face is “constructed discursively with other members of the group” (Locher/Watts 2005: 12), it is, in a certain way, borrowed from others. In other words: it is a role an individual decides to play in a certain situation which is accepted by partners as a kind of tacit mutual agreement on the characteristics of the ongoing interaction. Arundale (2006: 202) uses this feature to distinguish face from *identity*: The latter is individual, whereas face is a dyadic phenomenon. Obviously, there is some kind of dialectic relationship between identity and face, between individual and social aspects. The two concepts should be discussed more deeply (cf. also the contribution of Locher/Bolander in this volume). For the present context it must be enough to refer to common communication models and the fact that here it is

quite normal to say that a message contains informations about the speaker (to be related with identity) on the one hand and about the relationship between speaker and listener (face work) on the other. In terms of the model proposed in Keller (1995: 216) where the author discusses different possible aims and effects/benefits of communication, face work can be seen as communicative activities with effects on the relationship between the actors ("Beziehung") and identity as part of the self-presentation of speakers and writers ("Image"). In terms of Jakobson identity can be associated to the expressive aspect of meaning and face to the conative aspect.

- 2) Face exists only in relationship with lines or strategies in interaction; it is a result of communication. It heavily depends on what a speaker wants to achieve by his communicative moves, or what hearers think he wants to achieve. "Line is defined as 'a pattern of verbal and nonverbal acts by which he [the speaker, C.E.] expresses his view of the situation [...]" (Watts 2003: 124).
- 3) Face is not static. It can change from one encounter to another and from one situation to another. It will always be a feature of a particular contact with particular partners.
- 4) Face is extremely important for the success of interactions. Goffman puts it in relationship with the sacred self and points out that the acceptance of the face of all participants is not an objective of interaction, but a condition for its possibility.
- 5) Therefore face has to be maintained and protected. Actors have to avoid threatening the face of anyone else if they want interaction to go on.

A part of the activities in any interaction will be driven by face work. Goffman uses this term "to designate the actions taken by a person to make whatever he is doing consistent with face" (Goffman 1967: 12).

Brown/Levinson (1987) introduced Goffman's ideas in the linguistic discussion, linking the face concept to politeness. They describe some speech acts as inherently face-threatening, and politeness as mitigation of those face-threatening acts. Politeness very much coincides with face work. Face, for these authors, consists of two opposing wants: the desire to be unimpeded by others, to have the freedom to do what one would like to do (negative face) and wanting to be respected and desirable (positive face).

This idea has been extremely productive, but also object of many critical approaches. Locher/Watts e.g. argue that "Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory is not in fact a theory of politeness, but rather a theory of facework [...]" (2005: 10). The risk is that one ambiguous concept (politeness) is being explained with the help of another one which is even more ambiguous. So much discussion has been dedicated to the better understanding of face (in the sense of face₂) and its relationship with politeness. Some researchers state that Brown and Levinson (B/L) interpreted the work of Goffman only in a selective way, misunderstanding it as individualistic and not considering the ritual aspects of face work. According to Werkhofer (1992: 180) this interpretation "introduces the remarkable premise that there must be, as a prerequisite for politeness to occur, a fundamental antagonism between the speaker's intentions, on the one hand, and social aspects, on the other." Also Bargiela-Chiappini (2003: 1460) tries to recover the original approach underlining the fact that Goffman was not so much interested in the individual and his psychology, but "rather in the syntactical relations among the acts of different persons". In the B/L-concept normal human beings are presumed to have some kind of paranoid features; they are described as always worrying about potential offences. Bargiela-Chiappini states: "It appears that in Brown and Levinson's treatment of 'face', Goffman's tendentially individualistic treatment of the 'sacred self' becomes an ob-

sessive attempt by an ideal rational actor to mark and protect personal territory from potentially harmful interpersonal contacts" (Bargiela-Chiappini 2003: 1461). In general among the critics of the B/L-approach there seems to be large agreement on the fact that the motivation for face work should not be understood so much as conscious individual strategy or the realisation of the speaker's wants, but rather as determined by the situation and by the cultures of the participants. O'Driscoll argues that "the concepts have to be extricated from B&L's construal of face as wants" (2007: 474). This point will be important for the analysis of face work in specific situations like forum discussions.

A more radical re-elaboration of the face concept has been proposed by Arundale (2006). The author not only criticises B/L, but also Goffman's conceptualisation. One of his reasons is theoretical: Face, in Goffman's sense, does not fit into a theoretical framework which Arundale defines as an interactional achievement model. The outlines of this model are drawn against the background of the concurring encoding/decoding model of communication which is – according to Arundale – not able to explain everything about communication and produces a reductive vision of face. The central concepts in this alternative framework for research on face are *interaction* and *relational*. Face is no longer defined as a matter of individual wants, but as a phenomenon that emerges in interaction, in relationships. The interactional dyad becomes the minimal unit of analysis (Arundale 2006: 196). For this author

[...] face is not a matter of the individual actor's public self-image. Instead, because social selves emerge in relationships with other social selves, face is an emergent property of relationships, and therefore a relational phenomenon, as opposed to a social psychological one. [...] face is a meaning or action, or more general an interpreting, that a participant forms in verbal and visible communication. (Arundale 2006: 201f.)

The reformulated concept of face differs from Goffman's model in two points that will be relevant for the discussion of communication in forums:

1. "For Goffman, social actors were individuals whose socialisation provided them with rules or scripts for ritual interaction [...]" (Arundale 2006: 198). Here the attention shifts to the construction of the normative framework in interaction. Individuals are not determined by socialisation instances, but produce themselves as social selves in communication. In the analysis of forum discussion we will focus on the construction of face in speaking and writing and in a dialectic relationship with the face work of other actors.
2. The setting of the interaction becomes much more important. From Arundale's point of view, Goffman is interested in "men and their moments" – in the impact of individual characteristics on the development of face. The revisited version of face aims to emphasise the contrary. In our discussion of communication forms that are partially determined by technical devices, analysis, in fact, will require a renewed approach that really puts more attention on "moments and their men". One of the questions will be which factors of the contextual conditions influence the specific strategies of face work.

In order to prepare a more concrete observation of face in discussion forums, another specification has to be made. The tradition of positive and negative face work also has to be revisited. Many authors have seen this as a weak point in Goffman's work. Without going into details, one can say that Arundale's solution (2006: 203f.) is indication of the dialectic of relational separateness and connectedness. This opposition is not to be understood as individual wants or needs, but rather as "characteristics, conditions or states evinced in the relationship the partners achieve interactionally". Connectedness is defined as "a complex of meanings and actions that may be apparent as unity, interdependence, solidarity,

association, congruence, and more, between the relational partners" whereas separateness "indexes meanings and actions that may be voiced as differentiation, independence, autonomy, dissociation, divergence, and so on."²

This kind of face2-concept, in fact, can be used to describe and explain communicative reality. It fits into a theory of communication and will be able to produce insights about face work and its relevance in the more general process of verbal interaction. It also becomes clear that face work cannot be identified with politeness; it is much more general than this.

Summarising and simplifying the detailed discussion of Arundale and trying to make it productive for the purpose of the present work, the questions about face in forum discussion will be: How do actors adapt to the requirements of the communication form? How do they interact in the process of face work? How does face appear? How much, and in which way, do the technical properties influence the strategies of face work? How are actors separated from and connected with others? Which communicative moves are made to get connected and/or separated? How do they reach a balance between both states? Is there a specific state of balance expected by participants of forums? This will be considered in more detail in the next section.

3. Face in forum discussions

Forums are virtual rooms in the internet in which registered people can join in and participate in discussions about themes proposed by other users or by an administrator. There are different

² For a detailed discussion of the distinction between separateness and connectedness and a slightly different approach see O'Driscoll 2007: 477ff.

types of forums and a great variety of forms (Ehrhardt 2009a: 118ff.). This paper will treat only examples from “Spiegel online-forum”; this is a news forum opened in the webpages of a news-magazine. Users can discuss political, cultural, economic or social topics – in many cases the starting point of the discussions is an article in the magazine or the online-platform. This kind of forum can be understood as a new and more interactive form of letters to the editor. The Spiegel-online-forum is one of the most popular ones in Germany in terms of number of participants and number of posts. Yet, obviously, it cannot be considered as representative of all forums. The analysis of this reality can only have the status of exemplification.

A first, rather unspectacular example taken from a discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of e-books will be useful in outlining the characteristics of the situation and in making some hypotheses regarding ‘what the moment makes with men and women’ (cf. also Ehrhardt 2009b: 174ff.).

#20 06.05.2010 11:30 von Jakob Schwarz

Zitat von **rumsfallera**

Ich vermute, dass bei einem Vielleser so ein Ebookreader ca. 3 Jahre hält, dann geht er auf den Müll. Für den mittleren Preis solch einen Readers kann man schon an die 25 aktuelle Taschenbücher kaufen. Also, wer ein ehrlicher Digitalkonsument ist, der brauch schon ein bisschen, bis er den Anschaffungspreis wieder raus hat.

Was ist ein Vielleser? Wenn ich als Pendler pro Woche zwei Bücher lese macht das bei 45 Arbeitswochen schon 90 Bücher im Jahr. In den von Ihnen veranschlagen drei Jahren wären das 270 Bücher. Da habe ich den Reader locker drin, wenn die E-Bücher auch nur ein oder zwei Euro billiger sind als die gedruckten Ausgaben.

Antworten / Zitieren

(1) SpOn 2010

- First of all, forum discussions are a dialogic form of communication. The text written by "Jakob Schwarz" is a reply to another one – written by "rumsfallera" and literally quoted in the new text. It has to be understood as a second move in a conversation. In the reply the author refers to the former text e.g. repeating the key word "Vielleseer", to the partner ("Ihnen") and to the content, commenting on it and arguing another opinion. Kreß (this volume) points out that forum communication has to be analysed as a form of connected communication ("Anschlusskommunikation") that can be fully understood only in the context of the pre-texts. The texts are coherent on a textual and a personal level. All the texts published in a forum are at least a comment on the original question posted by the initiator of the discussion – in many cases they are also direct answers to other contributions. Sometimes the discussion goes on; there can be very long exchanges between two people. However, this can work only if the partner has the impression that they are being respected and treated with the necessary amount of politeness and face work. When communicating in a dialogical form, actors will most probably have to pay attention to relational work.

- The discussion is clearly not synchronic. The first text was published at 10:51 of the same day. There is more than half an hour between the publishing of one text and the other. There are many examples where the chronological distance is even longer. It is not difficult to find answers to contributions posted several months before. Authors have time to plan, structure and write their texts. In fact, "Jakob Schwarz" publishes a real, well-structured argument. If an author is able to be so clear on the level of the organisation of his messages, he can be expected to structure the relational management at the same level and avoid face-threatening acts.

- There is also a potentially big spatial distance between the partners. They might even be in different parts of the world while they discuss. Even if they are not, they cannot see or hear each other. There is very little information on the non-verbal channel. Face work takes place almost exclusively in verbal communication.
- The communication on forums is written communication. In comparison to other web-based communication forms such as chat rooms or to SMS-communication, authors respect the language norms very much.
- Participants are anonymous, readers only know the nickname under which an author is registered. Sometimes (as in the example) the nickname appears to be a real name, but there is no certainty that this is true. So one of the fundamental rules of politeness is suspended: In real-life encounters authentic self-presentation is one of the most important prerequisites for a successful conversation. Face work becomes rather difficult if we don't know who we are speaking to. Liedtke (2011: 60) supposes that an effect of anonymity could be a kind of immunisation against face-threats in the sense that it could be more acceptable (compared with other forms of communication) for a participant to say honestly what he thinks without using indirect or polite forms.³
- However, participants are not only "nameless". Partners also lack other information about the people with whom they are engaged. The only details everyone can see in the browser is the user status (new or frequent user), the number of posts published so far and, sometimes, a geographical localisation which might be as true as the name. It is not possible to produce a message based on a reliable hypothesis about the reader and his characteristics. In this setting identity does not matter. As a participant of forum discus-

³ For further discussion on aspects of self-presentation in forums see the contribution of Schrader-Kniffki in this volume.

sion, a person has no identity. It is only face that is relevant here. It will be interesting to see if this is compensated by closer attention to the construction of face, and what it means for the realisation of the dialectics between separateness and connectedness.

- There are explicit rules for forum communication: Spiegel-online does not reproduce the guidelines, but "objectification" is largely accepted and quoted by users of all forums. It is, e.g., forbidden to be impolite or ambiguous, to offend others or to forget that readers are also human beings with their rights and interests (cf. <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Netiquette>). If a user does not respect these rules, there will be sanctions: the administrator will cancel his contribution. Actors are not free to style their relationships with partners as they want. Also face work-activities will, in some way, be limited.

- In general, relationship management is not as important as argumentation. As with the example, many texts in forums are written in a rather sober style. Users are expected to be clear in the presentation of their opinions and always to stay within the thematic line of the discussion. The content of the message counts much more than the relational activities. The text written by "Jakob Schwarz" also seems to suggest the hypothesis that in face work, separateness can be much more important than connectedness: the writer expresses his personal meaning that distinguishes him from others and does very little to create solidarity. He does not seem to be interested in forming a group with the readers.

- The discussion is public. Every writer addresses at least three types of readers: the direct partner to whom he answers, the other active participants of the conversation that are supposed to give their comments, and the passive readers that form a kind of public audience. Face is negotiated in a public space and in different circles of audience. If a participant loses his face, he certainly loses only his virtual face as an anonymous user, but a great number of

people will witness this loss; reconstruction will be more difficult than in private space.

- The texts in forums are, in general, persuasive, they aim to present an idea, a point of view or an opinion and convince readers to share it or at least to reason on it. If there are face work and politeness activities, it could be strategic; actors use it to make their opinion more acceptable to others. In comparison with other forms of communication there is a clear preference for dissension: a forum discussion cannot go on if everybody has the same opinion. Agreement is not at all the preferred strategy within the forum-community as pointed out also by Angouri/Tseliga. The authors state that what is acceptable and allowed depends very much on the concrete context of a communication and on local practices. In their analysed data from Greek forums there is, as in the German examples, a clear tendency to disagreement:

“Disagreement is the norm in the two fora we study as the topics the participants bring to discussion are typically highly controversial.” (Angouri/Tseliga 2010: 60)

So the format stimulates the expression of different points of view and speech acts such as criticism, correction, disagreement, expression of doubt and other potentially face-threatening activities (Ehrhardt 2010: 177; cf. also the contribution of Thaler in this volume). It will be interesting to see in which ways these speech acts are realised and if face work is used to mitigate the impact.

The characteristics of forum communication mentioned above seem to suggest that there is a well-defined line for the discussions and that the context sets a frame for the possible face work of the participants. The anonymous online-discussion might be polemic, but it always has to be theme-orientated, cooperative, responsible, serious and ethically and politically correct. Every user is expected to present himself as a person interested in the opinions of others, as polite, critical, well-informed about the facts in discussion,

willing to say something new etc. Forum discussions therefore pre-structure face, there is a kind of default-face which every writer has to accept in order to be admitted as a participant.

Obviously, however, this is not enough to create an interesting discussion. Forum-authors will do more than simply be the ideal average user. What they can do, and in fact do, will be the object of the following section. Some examples will be discussed in order to see what is possible and acceptable. According to the relational notion of face presented in the second section, the examples will all be texts in which the face of one actor is for some reason mentioned or discussed by another. In many cases this denotes that there is some conflict regarding face, or that there is something wrong with the face of one author. The hypothesis is that "it is the participants' interpretations, not the analyst's, that comprise the evidence in studying facework" (Arundale 2006: 209).

4. Examples

Even at a quick glance on forum discussions it becomes evident that there really is a great amount of face work taking place. Engaging in this kind of discussion has much in common with the moment of the initiation of a conversation with an unknown person: it is important for a speaker to show that they are aware of the goal of the interaction and is willing to do everything to reach it; but it is also important to establish contact on a personal level, to present oneself as a respectable actor, to show the necessary respect to others and to demonstrate that one's engagement is not only formal, but sustained by a certain, also personal, interest. The following examples have been chosen in order to demonstrate which communicative acts speakers perform so as to personalise the discussion, to develop individual features and to demonstrate

how other actors react to this, and how, with their reaction, they constitute face. A second group of examples shows moments in which there is something wrong on the level of relational work: a speech act stimulates reactions which give evidence that face has been threatened or violated.

In a discussion thread about the foreign policy of the German chancellor Merkel in the moment of the crisis of the Euro and the EU-institutions (SpOn 2012a), for instance, there is a rather long exchange between two participants about their personal situation and the coherence between this and their positions held in the discussions. One speaker (his nickname is "Finnegan") presents himself as a "basic socialist" (post no. 18) because he is owner of company shares and therefore wants to make sure that normal citizens are in possession of capital. Other users answer that it was exactly this kind of financial speculation that caused the crisis. Someone describes the way he acts as "getting rich without working". To one of them, named "krassopoteri", "Finnegan" answers:

- (2) Ich frage mich, wovon Sie wohl leben wollen, wenn Sie nicht mehr arbeiten können, weil Sie zu alt sind. Von der Rente?? Da werden Sie später aber mal eine böse Überraschung erleben. (no. 29)

I ask myself what you are going to live on when you are unable to work because you are too old. On the pension?? You will have a bad surprise later.

These two people now become the main actors of the conversation. One reason for the intense discussion which ensues is the fact that "krassopoteri" also touches a personal level. His answer is:

- (3) Gemach Bruder, ich lebe bereits seit 2003 von meiner Rente. Weil ich auch schon seit ich 50 Jahre alt war, lang ist es her, immer ziemlich genau wusste, was ich zu erwarten hatte, wurde ich auch nicht enttäuscht. Ich sag es noch einmal, schönen Gruss von der Insel, Sie haben sich den absolut Falschen ausgesucht. (no. 32)

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Slowly, brother, I have been living on my pension since 2003. Because since I was 50, a long time ago, I have known rather well what I had to expect, I have not been disappointed. I say it again, many greetings from the island, you have chosen the wrong person.

Both actors here go much beyond their anonymous status as forum users, they reveal information about their personal situation. This is not absolutely necessary in order to motivate their positions – on the contrary: it is not easy to see how it relates to foreign policy. The self-presentation is a surplus of personal involvement which is productive for the maintenance of controversial discussion, because it offers positions which can be challenged and it demonstrates personal engagement and authority in the discussion.

In terms of face work, the communicative actions are understood by partners in the sense of separateness, a move towards the constitution of a subject as unique, special and different from others: from now on “krassopoteri” is treated by all users as the person that lives abroad and discusses German politics from this point of view. Yet that is not all: the reaction shows that it is accepted also as an effort to do something in order for the discussion to go on and to be animated, to make it appear as an exchange between people that know each other and feel close, not as a discussion about abstract positions but about abstract positions held by concrete people. Otherwise the partner would not accept the topic and even continue it by saying that he is living on an island (later it turns out to be a British island). So the self-presentation is also interpreted as a signal of connectedness, of constitution of a group.

The quoted exchange of messages shows that this works, but other quotations give the impression that it is not accepted by all readers. Some participants criticise the two actors for their personal information and for losing contact with the argument of the discussion:

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- (4) Die letzten 12 Beiträge befassen sich nur noch mit privaten oder sonstigen Finanzproblemen. (no. 70)

The last 12 postings only speak about private and other financial problems.

- (5) Und solchen privaten Schmarren breiten Sie hier aus? (no. 71)

And you lay out that private stuff here?

Obviously those two writers would like everyone to accept the theme-oriented, sober and impersonal style of a forum-discussion and limit face work to what is necessary in order to maintain and ascribe default-face. Debates regarding the right type and amount of face work give evidence of what is considered to be adequate in the given context.

Another type of debate regards violations or threats to face. It has already been noted that in a controversial debate there will be many risks of bothering the face of others. The discussion is sometimes rather polemic and some contributions would most probably be seen as offensive in other settings. In the forum discussion they pass without being noted. However, it is also easy to find examples in which a participant reacts and makes understood to a speaker that he has gone too far. This will be discussed with two concluding examples in which writers try to correct something stated by others. In a discussion about the best main candidate of the opposition party for the next German elections (SpOn 2012b) a user complains about errors in a text published in a newspaper; those errors give a completely wrong idea of the author's ideas. The user especially complains about the ignorance of translators or printers that – from his point of view – are responsible for the final version of a text. "matthes schwalbe" answers him:

- (6) Forumist Berg, nur der Ordnung halber: ein Drucker ist nicht für evtl. Fehler im Inhalt einer Drucksache verantwortlich- dafür gibt es bei uns im Westen Lektoren. [...] Und schwups, schon haben Sie wieder was gelernt lieber [...]. (no. 40)

Claus Ehrhardt

Forum-writer Berg, just to be correct: a printer is not responsible for errors in a manuscript – for this, we in the west have proof-readers. [...] So you have learnt something new, dear [...].

The author here establishes himself as a person that knows better, he says that “berg” has directed his criticism towards the wrong people. He states that the partner is not competent in this occasion, threatening his status as a well-prepared participant in the discussion who argues on the basis of solid knowledge. And “berg” replies on the same personal level, he does not say anything about the topic of the discussion but comments on the face-threatening act of his interlocutor:

- (7) “Oberlehrer” kann man eigentlich nicht falsch schreiben.:-)) (no. 42)
“oberlehrer” can’t be written in the wrong way.:-))

The term “Oberlehrer” is usually used to refer to people who lack intellectual modesty; they believe they know everything better than all the others and leave others to feel ignorant. What is interesting here is the fact that on a superficial level “berg” does not react to the threat to his own face; he comments on the image of “matthes schwalbe” trying to make the correction appear as a threat to the author’s face. Probably the criticism formulated in (6) was too direct, strong and personal to be accepted. “matthes schwalbe” did not do enough to protect the partner’s face, to underline that he still feels part of the group and maintains solidarity with the others. Whatever he wanted to communicate here – in the eyes of his readers he appears to be arrogant, pedantic, uncooperative, at least at this moment. With his apparent lack of tact, sensibility and empathy he produces only separation and no connectedness. Where the face of other actors might really be threatened, a writer has to use more polite speech acts to avoid communicative incidents like the one in the example. If he is not polite enough, he risks undermining his own face or his reputation as a cooperative participant.

The dynamics of the situation are completely different in another section of the discussion on the politics of the German chancellor. At a certain point a user ("allana") speaks about financial speculation and quotes a poem by Tucholsky in which the author blames capitalism. The speaker states that the poem was published in 1930, but can be applied perfectly to the present situation. The user "ray 4912" answers:

- (8) interessant aber leider nicht von T. (hätte man leicht daran erkennen können, wenn man gewisse moderne" Fachausdrücke sieht. [...] Deshalb ist Ihre Trouvaille doch wertvoll, danke! (no. 88)

Interesting, but not by Tucholsky (one could easily have noticed if one sees certain "modern" technical terms) [...] Anyway your trouvaille is precious, thanks!

Here too a writer reacts to an error of another – he has immediately noticed that Tucholsky cannot be the author of this poem and also makes clear that the reader should easily understand this. This also seems to allude to a lack of intelligence and preparation regarding the argument. However, the addressee (she turns out to be female) is not at all offended, she manages to create a polite exchange out of this unpleasant situation. Her answer is:

- (9) aber ein "Danke" auch von mir für die Aufklärung. Jetzt weiß ich sogar was eine "Trouvaille" ist, und ich habe mal ein bißchen "recherchiert": [...] Jetzt wüsste ich zu gern, was es mit der Sprache von 1930 so auf sich hat. Sprachen die Menschen denn damals so vollkommen anders als heute? Ich glaube, dass ich meine Muttersprache "deutsch" einigermaßen beherrsche; allerdings bin ich keine Spezialistin auf diesem Gebiet. (no. 89)

Anyway a "thank you" from me for the illumination. Now I even know what a "Trouvaille" is and I have done some "research". [...] Now I would really like to know what it is about the language of 1930. Did people really speak in a completely different way than today? I believe I speak my mother tongue "German" rather well; but I'm not an expert in this field.

It is also worth quoting the next message of "ray4912":

- (10) Danke für den Dank und auch nochmals zurück;-) Die Herkunft der Termini haben Sie ja bereits geklärt! Ich hätte präzisieren sollen, dass ich den Slang der heutigen Börsenmafia, meinte, [...] Sicher bin ich nicht, auch kein Experte in Linguistik und zudem konservativer Anleger in eigener bescheidener Immobilie [...] ;-) (no. 94)

Thanks for the thank you and thank you back ;-) You have already explained the origins of the technical terms. I should have said that I was talking about the slang of the modern stock exchange mafia [...] I'm not sure, I'm not an expert in linguistics and furthermore a conservative investor in modest terrain property [...]

A potentially highly face-threatening act does not bother the discussion – on the contrary, it develops into an exchange of polite messages and a friendly atmosphere; the writers involved even use greeting forms (“mfg” and “sympathisierender gruss”) to end their messages which is rather unusual in this forum. This face-threatening act, in the end, also produces connectedness. “Ray4912” not only introduces himself as a more critical and competent reader of the poem, he also recognises the relevance of the quotation and demonstrates his gratefulness for it. “Allana” seems to be slightly sarcastic when she mentions that she has also learnt a new French word, but she immediately recognises that she was wrong and accepts that her own face is in danger. She simply turns her lack of knowledge into virtue and asks other questions. In this way she accepts the partner’s signals aiming at a confidential atmosphere and in this moment creates a positive face for herself and for “ray”.

5. Conclusions

The discussion of the examples should certainly go into further detail and should include more texts. This is not possible here.

Despite this, the discussion produces initial evidence that there really is a kind of default face that all participants in forum discussions are expected to respect. It also shows that often actors are not satisfied with having only this basic face. They want to appear more individual. However, this is risky, it may be criticised by others and it may damage the communicative balance. Forum users are probably more tolerant to face-threats than are speakers in “normal” conversations. However, incidents happen – especially when the separateness-orientation becomes much more important than the effort to maintain connectedness.

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Reflections on the Psychological Terms *Self* and *Identity* in Relation to the Concept of *Face* for the Analysis of Online Forum Communication

1. Introduction

In online forums people may upload a picture, a signature and other features to extend their user profile. They create an avatar (Stephenson 1992), a representation of ‘one-self’ (not necessarily ‘their self’) or a virtual identity. Users’ interaction in an online forum both by means of their avatars and text is of interest for the concept of *face* as a term of linguistic politeness. Politeness research in traditional face-to-face environments (cf. Brown/Levinson 1978/1987; Leech 1983; Watts 2003) has been transferred to computer-mediated communication (CMC) environments (cf. Thaler 2012; Locher 2010; Angouri/Tseliga 2010; Fuentes Rodríguez/Alcaide Lara 2009). However, the main focus of these studies is on the verbally expressed content. Very little has been investigated on a multimedial basis (cf. Alcaide Lara 2009 on advertisement; Thaler 2012: 139-143 on emoticons) as i.e. available in an online forum.

Face is frequently mentioned in (im)politeness research although it is independently established not only in pragmatics but also in sociolinguistics, anthropology, sociology, communication studies, psychology, and others (Haugh/Bargiela-Chiappini 2010: 2073).

Spencer-Oatey (2007: 640) attested that for a profound understanding of the concept of face a multidisciplinary approach is required, especially of social psychology and linguistics. Locher (2008) argues similarly concerning the concept of face in regard to *identity* concepts.

Social psychology is the field where research and discussions about self have been going on for over a decade and where the distinction to the term identity has been developed and addressed. The self or the psychology of the self has been of great interest by psychological researchers especially from the 1980s onwards (cf. Mummendey's (1995) "Psychologie der Selbstdarstellung" ("Psychology of Self Presentation"), the volume of Greve (2000) "Psychologie des Selbst" ("Psychology of the Self") or Brandtstädter's (2007) monographic study on the flexible self).¹

In this paper, I reflect on the terms self, identity and face. Hence, I will give (psychological) definitions of the terms self and identity and differentiate the two terms before I detail the concept of face. I also align possible distinctions between the terms self, identity and face to determine which applies best to describe the impact of online forum avatars and the related communication to other users. The focus of my investigation is on what content they create and on how they behave online. I will exemplify the use of face in a qualitative analysis in the Spanish online forum *Crepúsculo* (*Twilight*). My aim is to show that out of the three terms only face is best applicable to be investigated in online forum communication.²

¹ A recent publication by Prinz 2013 with its focus on volition and intentionality shows that the topic of *self* is still up to date.

² To avoid terminological confusion I will use the adjectives positive and negative in their evaluative and most obvious or lay person's meaning and not as introduced by Brown and Levinson 1978/1987 for their politeness theory as scientific terms.

2. Self, identity and face

The term *identity* is used in many disciplines such as psychology, sociology, sociolinguistics, and computer science. It has become a 'common' term and it is often not exactly referred to its meaning in a particular context. It gets even more confusing if the term *self* comes in (Ashmore/Jussim 1997: 5). The concepts of *self* and *identity* are often conflated as mentioned in Kresic (2006: 65) and as a consequence treated as synonyms. In some cases, it seems that there is an unmentioned difference (cf. Hogg/Vaughan 2008; McKinlay/McVittie 2008). However, terminological clarification is seen as a condition for understanding in the field of social psychology (Greve 2000: 16). Some studies on *identity* have already raised the necessity to differentiate *identity* and *self* (cf. Kresic 2006 or Harris's 1989 distinction of person, individual and self³). It is also noted that the distinction of the two terms is rather discussed in psychological literature (Kresic 2006: 65). Yet, the two terms are not of pure psychological interest. Köhler (2003) also discusses the boundaries and denominators of *identity* and *self* in his interdisciplinary doctoral thesis "Das Selbst im Netz" ("The Self on the Internet") in which he describes the notion of self in CMC.

The terminological clarification becomes even more important as soon as another concept is brought up to the spotlight: *face*. The notion of *face*, originally derived from Goffman (1955/1967), is frequently used in the context of linguistic politeness (cf. Brown/Levinson 1978/1987; Watts 2003; Locher/Watts 2005), although its independence from linguistic politeness is also discussed (cf. Gar-

³ From an anthropologic point of view Harris 1989 tries to draw a line between terminologies such as "person, self and individual". (For a distinction of 'agent, individual and person' see Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2013: 9-10). Therefore, he sometimes uses the term *identity* to describe the *self* (cf. Harris 1989: 601) but does not treat the two terms as synonyms (cf. Harris 1989: 602).

cés-Conejos Blitvich 2013: 1).⁴ In this paper I focus on what exactly is meant by the concepts *self*, *identity* and *face*. The following chapters discuss each term separately to bring up differences between the terms and determine an appropriate terminological usage with regard to the analysis of online forum communication.

2.1. Self

The *Academic Dictionary of Psychology* defines *self* as “[a] symbol-using individual who can reflect upon their own behaviour” (Chopra 2005: 236). In this definition the introspection is highlighted. Thereafter, it is no surprise that *self* sometimes is equated with individual (cf. Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2013: 9). According to Mummendey (1995: 54) the *self* represents the subjective view of an individual on himself. *Personality* can be used for a more objective point of view of an individual (ibid.). The *self* is not to be seen as a person within a person, but more how people see, describe and perceive themselves currently or retrospectively (Greve 2000: 16). Yet, current circumstances may not be a part of ourselves.⁵ To differentiate the *self* from the self concept, Mummendey (1995: 56) refers to the *self* “as a concept of one’s one personality” (ibid., my translation) and to the self concept as an “attitude to oneself” (ibid., my translation). As the self concept is part of the *self*, one can simply speak of *the self*. Other psychologists such as Greve (2000) and Brandtstädter (2007) describe “the self as a dynamic system” (Greve 2000: 17) and a “flexible process” (Brandtstädter 2007: 11f.; Greve 2000: 99).

⁴ The terms *face* and *identity* are for example distinguished in Arundale 2006, further discussed in Spencer-Oatey 2007 and in the *Journal of Politeness Research* on *face* and *identity* (cf. Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2013).

⁵ For example, it is not part of our *self* that we wear a red pullover today (Greve 2000: 20).

Drawing on psychological literature mentioned, the *self* can be referred to as cognitive thinking of oneself in real life.

Brewer and Gardner (1996: 84) add another dimension by distinguishing three levels of self-representation:

- (1) [a]t the individual level, the personal self [...]", (2) "[...] at the interpersonal level, the relational self [...]", (3) "[...] at the group level, the collective self [...]" (Brewer/Gardner 1996: 84).

The latter corresponds to the concept of *social identity* (cf. Hogg/Abrams 1988; cf. below McKinlay/McVittie 2008). It becomes obvious from their definition that there is an intersection to the term *identity* (cf. Brewer/Gardner 1996).

2.2. Identity

In everyday life, *identity* is often equalled with characteristics. From a psychological point of view, Mummendey (1995: 57; 2006: 85) speaks of *identity* as an opposition to social roles (i.e. an individual can be a mother, a teacher, etc.). Although our behaviour may vary according to the role we incorporate in a certain moment, we are still the same person. The concept of *identity* – more than the concept of *self* – marks the distinctive, consistent and unique of an individual (Mummendey 1995: 54; Mummendey 2006: 85). Other scholars broaden the term identity by adding different perspectives. For example, McKinlay/McVittie (2008: 39) regard *identity* as a discursive phenomenon that is socially negotiated. They highlight the importance of context in which identity is reflected (McKinlay/McVittie 2008: 22). They categorise *identity* in "conversational identity"⁶ as "[...] immediate identities of speaker, listener [...]" (McKinlay/McVittie 2008: 23).

⁶ A similar approach to conversational identities is that of *narratives identities*. For this approach see Locher/Bolander in this volume.

In the context of online interaction they speak of “virtual identities” and define them as “[f]orms of identity that people take up in online communication and communities” (McKinlay/McVittie 2008: 37). In their summary, they claim that

Identities are not simply features or products of the individual, but rather should be viewed as practices within interactions with others and the outcomes of those interactions (McKinlay/McVittie 2008: 39).

Therefore, it can be stated that *identity* is also relational. Locher (2008: 511) takes a slightly different notion stating that “[...] identity refers to the ‘product’ of [...] linguistic and non-linguistic processes” drawing on the sociolinguistic framework of Bucholtz and Hall (2005) and on a definition of *identity* by Mendoza-Denton (2002: 475). According to Mendoza-Denton

[i]dentity [...] is neither attribute nor possession, but an individual and collective-level process of semiosis. (ibid.)

It is important to stress that *identity* is both individual and collective (i.e. being a teacher and sharing a *group identity* towards other teachers). This is also acknowledged in McKinlay/McVittie (2008: 41) and Hogg/Vaughan (2008: 123). Norris (2011) researched people’s *identity* intensively for a long time concluding

[...] when investigating real people in their everyday lives identity emerges; it becomes visible, explainable, and graspable. (Norris 2011: xiii)

As a consequence, I sum up that *identity* is consistent over a period of time and can be described as what a person identifies with individually and socially.

2.3. Face

Face in the sense of i.e. pragmatic research is a second-order term.⁷ It is defined top down as a scientific concept and should not be confused with the lay concept of face as part of the body. Goffman first defined the concept of face in “On face-work: an analysis of ritual elements in social interaction” which was published in *Psychiatry* in 1955 and reprinted in *Interaction ritual* in 1967. Thereafter, face can be described as

[...] the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. (Goffman 1967: 5)

In their politeness theory, Brown and Levinson (1978/1987) draw on the concept of *face* from Goffman (1955/1967) but use it in a more individualistic way. For them *face* can be equated to social wants (Brown/Levinson 1987: 62). Spencer-Oatey (2007: 639) noted that in defining *face* there is most likely a reference to the *self*. For example, Goffman describes *face* as “[...] an image of the self [...]” (1967: 5). Brown and Levinson define it as

[...] the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself [...]. These are just two examples for a connection of *face* to *self*.⁸ (Brown/Levinson 1987: 61)

Others favour a stronger separation of the above terms. Haugh and Chiappini (2010: 2073), as an example, call for an independent face theory aside from politeness (Haugh/Chiappini 2010: 2078).⁹ Arundale (2010: 2078), in the same issue of the *Journal of Pragmatics*, comes up with an independent ‘Face Constitution Theory

⁷ I refer to first- and second-order politeness which was first introduced by Eelen 2001. See Watts 2003: 9-12 for further discussion of the two notions of politeness.

⁸ For more references on *self* in definitions of *face* see Spencer-Oatey 2007: 639.

⁹ It remains unclear how this can be achieved without noticing the involved culture-specific elements but not being completely driven by them (Haugh/Chiappini 2010: 2078).

(FCT)' stating that "[...] Face Constitution Theory employs a new conceptualisation of 'face' in terms of the *relationship* two or more persons create with one another in interaction." He distinguishes his concept of *face* from person centered attributes such as public self-image (Goffman 1955/1967), social identity, or social wants (Brown/Levinson 1987). Arundale describes *face*

[...] as a relational and interactional phenomenon arising in everyday talk/conduct, as opposed to a person-centered attribute understood as determining the shape of an individual's utterance. (Arundale 2010: 2079)

Face can only be achieved conjointly, in relation with others and does not belong to a single individual (Arundale 2010: 2085). Although Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2013: 15) appreciates Arundale's (2010) effort to conceptualise *face* aside from the Goffmanian definition, she is against splitting up *face* completely from *identity*. The above opinions emphasise how interesting it is to relate the three terms *self*, *identity* and *face* to each other.

2.4. Identity and self in relation to face

Goffman (1955/1967) defines *face* explicitly as a positive value. In contrast, *identity* can be evaluated on a scale from negative to positive. To point out one of the core distinguishing arguments between *face* and *identity*, imagine a person who belonged to a violent gang for years, went to prison and now refrains from his violent, false behaviour which was part of his *identity* although it was negative (cf. also McKinlay/McVittie 2008: 24). *Identity* does not have to be positive (cf. also Spencer-Oatey 2007: 643). Let us think of another example: A person is teaching her mother tongue English. Her profession is not special to her; it is just her job and she is satisfied to have it. Hence, identifying with the profession as an English teacher might be perceived as neutral. Of course, these

evaluations may vary from person to person and within different contexts (Spencer-Oatey 2007: 644). Nevertheless, these examples show that *identity* can be seen as negative, neutral or positive. Furthermore, it does not only have to be an individual identification but people might also identify as member of a group (i.e. English teachers). Therefore, as already mentioned, *identity* is also not only an individual phenomenon (as classified by i.e. Arundale 2006: 202).

For Goffman and his work, it can be stated, as did Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2013: 9-15), that he conceptualises *identity* (cf. Goffman 1963) and *face* (Goffman 1955/1967) very close to each other. Yet, I propose to add another distinguishing aspect to separate the terms *identity* and *face*: historicity. Let us think again about the English teacher. Imagine she just started teaching a short time ago. Of course, she would like to be seen and accepted as a teacher in her working environment (as part of her *face*) although she might not yet *identify* (in terms of *identity*) with being a teacher or belonging to the group of teachers. According to Greve (2000: 18), it is important to consider that *identity* is built through one's own history more than through characteristics, roles, and attributes. However, in my opinion *identity* is not graspable only by analysing communication in an online forum. *Face* does not necessarily need historicity to be accepted or negotiated.¹⁰ This distinguishes *identity* from *face* and was also addressed by Haugh and Chiappini (2010: 2073). *Face* can be seen as a mask (Locher 2004: 52). We

¹⁰ I only focus on western societies. My distinction between *identity* and *face* with regard to historicity does not apply to Chinese culture where I consider *face* to be a more important societal phenomenon and thus more enduring as mentioned by Ho 1994: 274. Spencer-Oatey 2005 divides the two notions of *face* into a situation specific *face* which she calls "identity face" and "responsibility face" as a pan-situational concept which is in line with Ho's definition above. I consider her term *identity face* as very confusing and therefore do not follow her labels. Nevertheless I agree that the Chinese or Asian notion of *face* is different and not covered in my conception.

‘wear’ it in a particular situation but get rid of it in another moment and take a different one. It becomes difficult to know what a person behind this mask is pretending or what is really true. We take a certain role or mask to be seen, negotiated, accepted, and approved by others, not just for ourselves. *Face* thus is clearly relational (here I agree with Arundale 2006: 202; Locher and Watts 2005; Locher 2008; Spencer-Oatey 2007). In the context of online communication (i.e. forums) the only available information can be extracted from the user posts. Instead of mask or role McKinlay/McVittie speak of “virtual identity” (2008: 37). So *identity* and *face* might have an intersection when speaking of *identity* as a (temporary) role which someone has in a particular context. As a result, on the one hand, I suggest using the term *identity* to stress continuity over history and a deeper incorporation into a person’s belief of himself. On the other hand, *face* can be more specific and observable in particular situations which are not necessarily explored over a long period of time. This includes how people want to be seen in a particular situation and therefore it is (usually) positive.¹¹

Concerning the relation of *face* and *self*, Chen (2001) stresses the importance of *self-face* by his dichotomic model of self-politeness on the one hand and other-politeness on the other hand. Traditional politeness models such as the other-politeness model of Brown and Levinson (1978/1987) focus on the speaker and his intention of being polite towards the other. Chen (2001: 89) adds that not only *face of the other* but also *face of self* or *self-face* can be vulnerable. The notion of self-face leads to a combination of the terms *self* and *face*. For his *self-face* proposal, Chen takes a broad definition of

¹¹ Of course there might be users who voluntarily try to disturb a discussion by acting impolitely on the internet and voluntarily create a negative *face* of themselves, such as Trolls. This can be seen as a special case of *face* and is not incorporated in the definition of *face* by Goffman 1955/1967.

Self and Identity in Relation to the Concept of Face

self as “[t]he term ‘self’, it should be noted, does not only refer to the speaker herself, but also those aligned with the speaker: her family, friends, colleagues, clients, and even her profession” (2001: 88, emphasis mine).¹² One distinguishing characteristic is that *self-face* is shown towards others whereas *self* is rather internal. It is the way a person thinks about himself, both positively and negatively. *Face* – and *self-face* hereafter – is in most cases positive (cf. Goffman’s quote above) and conveys how a person wants to be seen by others. In summary, the three terms can be distinguished by (1) **self** can be described as (internal) thoughts about oneself, (2) **identity** is linked to continuity or historicity and (3) **face** is rather situational and how we want to be seen by others and therefore external.

2.5. *Self, identity and face for analysing online forum communication*

As Harris mentioned, *self* can be regarded as a “psychological conceptualisation” (1989: 599). According to Spencer-Oatey (2009: 152) *self* is the notion that links *identity* and *face*. Yet, there are differences as outlined in the previous chapter. To keep the terms clear for the analysis, I will explain in the following what I mean by speaking of *self*, *identity* and *face*, especially in the context of CMC. I will use the two oppositions “internal/embodied” – “external/disembodied” meaning ‘only in our thoughts, brain’ (internal or embodied) and ‘communicated, shared and discussed

¹² To illustrate an alignment of *self*, Chen 2001: 88 gives the example of a White House Speaker who acts according to a kind of corporate identity towards a public audience. *Self* in this context is clearly relational as it is defined by the representation of a person of an item she can identify with towards others.

with others' (external or disembodied). Fig. 1 at the end of this chapter illustrates the distinction graphically.¹³

Following Greve (2000) *self* can be seen as what a person thinks about himself because of past or present experiences or what he wishes for himself in the future (see fig. 1). *Self* is usually an embodied and internal notion.¹⁴ Furthermore, what a person thinks of himself has also impact on what he identifies with and vice versa. This is illustrated in fig. 1 by the arrows linking *self* with *identity*.

Identity in relation to *self* describes what shapes the *self*. Although strongly interrelated, the notion of *identity* is different to the notion of self. Historicity plays a crucial part as explained previously. It is mostly internal and embodied but can also become external and disembodied. This is especially the case when thinking of a *group identity*, such as for example the group of baseball players and doctors (see arrows between *identity* and the pictures at the bottom of fig. 1). As a result, *identity* is both an internal and external notion.

Face – on the other hand – is only a relational phenomenon, and therefore external and disembodied as highlighted by the bold arrow passing through the two computers in fig. 1. In this context, and as a sub-category of *face*, *self-face* refers to the *face* which a speaker addresses speaking of himself whereas *face of the other* is the *face* a speaker addresses by referring to another participant (in a forum for example). What a person tells an (online) audience about herself (be it true or not) relates to her *self-face*. The only information accessible is the presentation and communication online which is related to the concept of *face*. This fact allows the conclu-

¹³ The two individuals mark the interaction (a woman and a man for a gender perspective).

¹⁴ In the English language there is even the suffix which hints at the embodied or referential component, as we refer to ourselves speaking of 'myself, yourself, himself' and so on.

sion that *face* is the only applicable concept when analysing CMC or more specifically forum communication.¹⁵

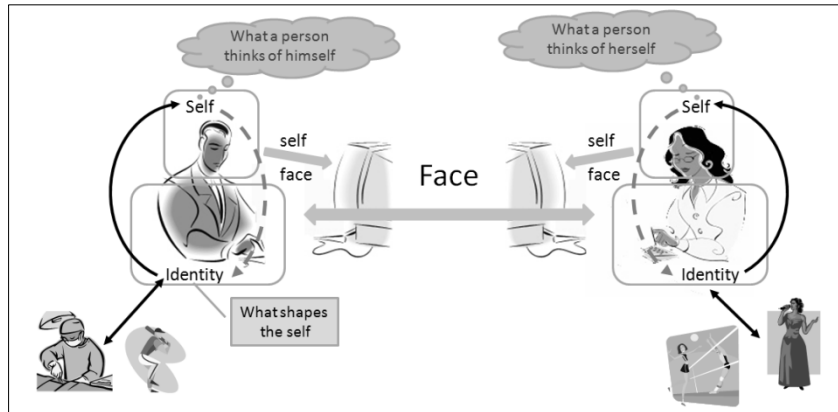


Fig. 1: Notions of identity, self and face in CMC

3. Analysis of a multicodeal online forum thread

Using these concepts to analyse an online corpus of a forum thread, it is evident to find external or disembodied content which is content that is verbalised or expressed in a certain way. In online forums people have the opportunity to express themselves; besides plain text they can also use nonverbal content such as (ani-

¹⁵ Let me quote an example which was given by a German participant at a Romance languages and literatures conference to support the differences between *self* and *identity* on the one hand and *face* on the other hand. She mentioned that she intentionally selected Spanish as her nationality to appear in her user profile in Spanish online discussion forums. Of course her real nationality is German and it is likely that she also identifies with the German language community. However, when she is acting online her *face* is Spanish as she wants to be seen as a member of the Spanish language community and not as a foreigner.

mated) pictures, videos, emoticons etc.¹⁶ So the content in users' posts may include verbal (words), nonverbal ((animated) pictures) and paraverbal information (bold or italic letters, lengthening of words etc.) (cf. Langlotz/Locher 2012: 1600). This is referred to as *multicodal* content as the given information is based on different codes (cf. Weidenmann 2002: 47).

To find out what people show about themselves and how this can be classified using the terms *self*, *identity* and *face*, I will qualitatively analyse a thread of the Spanish fan-forum *Crepúsculo*¹⁷ around the saga *Twilight* by examining multicodal content such as profile pictures and verbal utterances.

The thread I examine in particular is called "Actores adecuados para crepusculo?" (Adequate actors for *Twilight*, my translation¹⁸) and was opened by the user k@th3rin in April 2009. The thread holds 50 posts in total and was actively discussed until October 2012.

Fig. 2 shows the initial post of k@th3rin. She clearly states her position: "Yo amo a Robert Pattinson y me cae bien Kristen!!" She loves Robert Pattinson and likes Kristen [Stewart], the two actors who play the protagonists Edward and Bella of the *Twilight* saga. One can neither speak of Kristen's or Robert's self nor of their identity. Yet, k@th3rin shows something about her self-face and positions herself. Later on in the same post, she writes about Kristen Stewart quite differently saying: "bueno para mi Kristen Stewart....no me gusta para nada!!" which is a face-threatening act (FTA) towards Kristen Stewart as well as to all her fans who might feel attacked by this utterance. She even redefines her position in

¹⁶ The information one is able to add to his profile varies from forum to forum. Standard in most communication forums is a user name accompanied by a picture.

¹⁷ The Spanish forum *Crepúsculo* (*Twilight*) is used by fans of the *Twilight* films to talk about their affiliation, the story, the actors etc.

¹⁸ All translations from Spanish to English that follow are my own.

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favour of Robert Pattinson and against Kristen Stewart who she would like to see replaced by the actress Ashley Grenne.

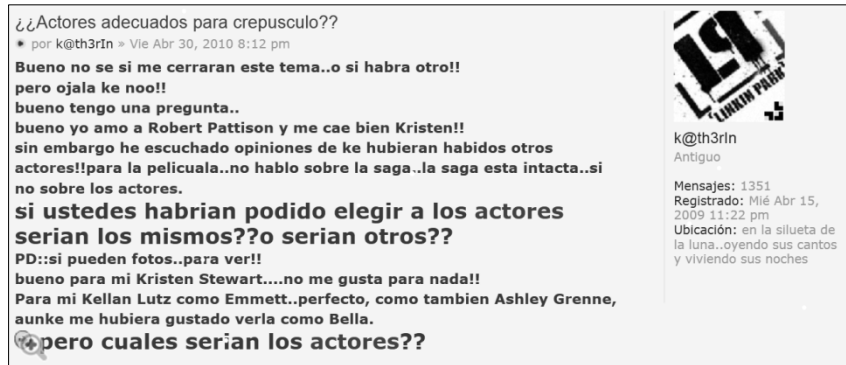


Fig. 2: Initial post of k@th3rin

By looking at the profile picture of k@th3rin in fig. 2, one would not connect it to *Twilight* directly. In her profile picture she makes reference to the US-American rock band *Linkin Park*. Nevertheless, there is a connection between the band and the film(s) as they are part of the soundtrack.¹⁹ So there is a link between her profile picture and the topic of the forum but it is only indirect and therefore not directly visible on the surface. This can be seen as an *in-group* marker. Fans of *Twilight*, its Soundtrack or band *Linkin Park* will regard her as 'one of them'. With this indirect 'message' k@th3rin shows something about her face – we do not know if she identifies in real life with *Linkin Park* but one can see that she wants to be recognised in the forum by the picture of *Linkin Park*.

¹⁹ The first film of the *Twilight* saga with their song "Leave out all the rest" (as the second song in the end credits).

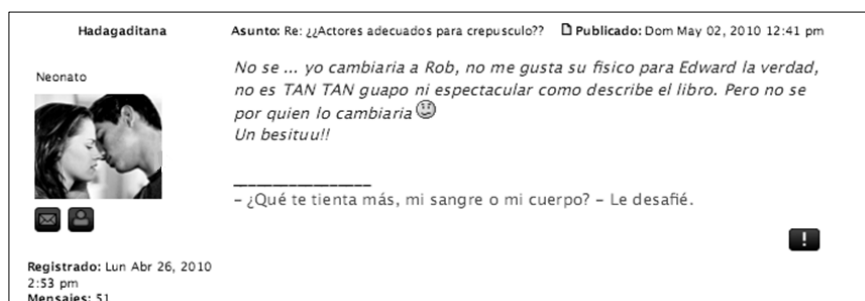


Fig. 3: Post of Hadagaditana

A direct link to the film can be found in the profile of the user Hadagaditana (fig. 3). Her profile picture shows Jacob (another protagonist in *Twilight*) and Bella kissing. Jacob, as a member of the werewolves, might be seen as an opponent to Edward who is a vampire. They are both in love with Bella and aim to win her heart. So by just uploading the picture as part of her avatar, Hadagaditana positions herself and shows that she is in favour of Jacob. Her posts underline her position. As an example, she writes in fig. 3 that she would change Robert Pattinson because she does not like his physical appearance and puts stress on that “no es TAN TAN guapo ni espectacular como describe el libro” (he is neither SO SO handsome nor spectacular as described in the book).



Fig. 4: Profile video clip sequence of maryche

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In contrast to Hadagaditana, maryche positions herself in an opposite direction. Her profile picture consists of the three pictures which can be seen in fig. 4.²⁰ The first picture is the family emblem of the Cullen Family. The second image consists of a picture of Edward holding Bella in his arms and looking at her while she holds herself tight to his arm. The third picture is the writing “I Do” which is the matrimony pledge of Edward and Bella in the fourth film (*Breaking Dawn – part one*). These pictures portray the user maryche as a fan of Edward winning the heart of Bella.

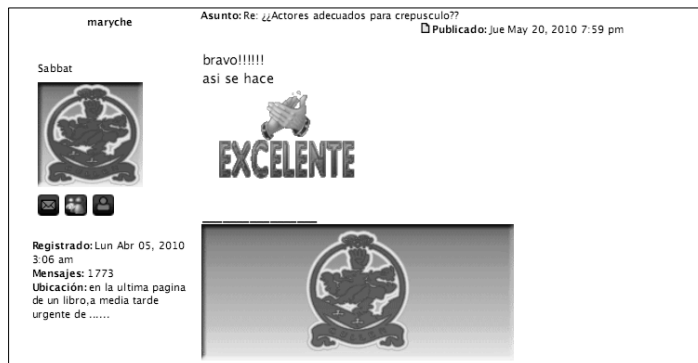


Fig. 5: Multicodal post of maryche with clapping hands

As it is also permitted to post pictures within a post, maryche uses pictures and videos not only in her profile but also to strengthen and underline her written words. The hands in fig. 5 are clapping as an animated picture, reinforcing her words “bravo!!!! asi se hace” (“bravo!!!! that’s how you do it”). She expresses her agreement with a previous post of k@th3rin. Pictures and videos are often a trigger for (further) comments as shown in the example of the related post by k@th3rin in fig. 6. After expressing laughter

²⁰ The three pictures are repeatedly shown one after another as a video clip.

("jajaj...") k@th3rin says she loves the picture of maryche by addressing her directly ("me ha encantado tu imagen...maryche !!!").



Fig. 6: Reference k@th3rin to post of maryche

These two posts (figs. 5 and 6) are face-enhancing acts (FEAs). In fig. 5, maryche reinforces the face of k@th3rin by agreeing with her and spending applause. In fig. 6, k@th3rin tells maryche that she loves her picture and therefore strengthens her face in choosing something good looking. To speak in terms of Brown and Levinson (1978/1987) both use politeness to enhance the face of the other. Interestingly, this is also done by nonverbal content such as the video of the clapping hands. As eye catcher it becomes topic in the ongoing conversation.

Of course, forum users do not only treat each other nicely by means of FEAs. There are many examples of FTAs in the thread as well. The following example from PekePsicopata (who does not have a profile picture) proves that people are aware of the fact that they might hurt other users' feelings. Before the utterance, she described two people who she would change for different actors and goes on as shown in fig. 7, which can be translated as follows: "I almost cried when I found out who would play Edward! (without offending his fans obviously!!!)".

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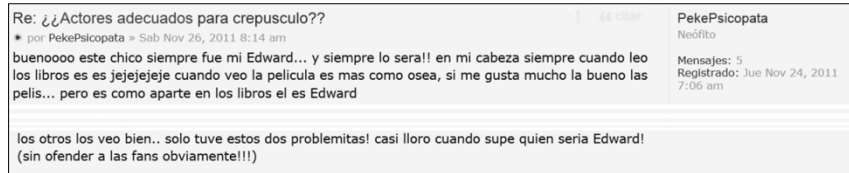


Fig. 7: Post of PekePsicopata with FTA

The user PekePsicopata threatens both the face of Edward/Robert Pattinson and of everyone affiliated to him as she expresses pity or sadness by uttering that she cried. This becomes obvious in her final remark (“sin ofender a las fans obviamente!!!”): She explicitly writes that she does not want to offend his fans. Despite her mitigation by admitting to not do it on purpose she risks to hurt. As mentioned by Goffman (1967: 42) we are aware that not only we but also other persons who share feelings for someone might be hurt by hurting that ‘loved’ person and not them directly. So we can threaten face indirectly and we are aware of it.

4. Conclusion

In my paper I have tried to show the differences between the terms *self*, *identity* and *face* in order to apply them in the analysis of online forum communication. Without further information about the users in real life, *face* seems to be the concept that is most appropriate for describing how people behave towards one another online.

One cannot speak of (real) *selves* of forum users by describing their avatars or other graphical and textual snippets although the persons behind these avatars might identify themselves with these musicians, actors or characters. We know too little from the analysis of the posts to name it identity, but of course, these avatars

shape the virtual identity of the users in the present forum albeit subject to change (i.e. animated avatar of maryche). This could indicate that virtual identity is not as consistent as the term *identity* implicates. It is doubtful that the historicity which is necessary to name a behaviour or character traits *identity* can be found online. As we do not know anything about the person behind the screen and what she thinks about herself (in real life), we cannot speak of *self*.

Speaking of *identity* requires deeper knowledge and insight of a person's mindset. To accompany someone or to have data of one and the same user over a period of time could be means to achieve this (as i.e. Norris (2011) did in her study). We could find reference to the *self* or the *identity* of a user from his utterances but one can never be sure without collecting further biographical data.

I hence conclude that it is best to use the concept of *face* to describe online behaviour of users through their posts and avatars. Avatars stand for an image, a (usually positive) value a person wants to be associated with in a forum.²¹ The above findings nevertheless encourage and make it in particular interesting to examine *face* in online communication.²² As online communication also consists of (animated) emoticons, text etc., multimedial information should be part of face work analysis in CMC (for a broader analysis see Fröhlich forthcoming). Especially, as soon as we do not analyse people's actions and statements in depth and at length 'behind the scene', it becomes questionable to speak of their *identity* according to the theoretical alignment in the first part. What people negotiate in online communication within a situational context is related to

²¹ Unless we analyse a troll or a person who intentionally aims to be impolite or rude towards others.

²² User names – although not dealt with in this article – are also part of face, i.e. PekePsicopata (LittlePsychopath). They also transport information a user shares with others. Their meaning – as part of face – can be reinforced or questioned through their online behaviour.

face. Through analysing *face* online we will see how – through which code (verbal, paraverbal or nonverbal) – and in which way it is approved or threatened by the actions of others.

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Part II

CONSTRUCTION OF GROUP IDENTITY IN SOCIAL MEDIA

Kristina Bedijs – Hildesheim

Shared Face and Face-Enhancing Behaviour in Social Media: Commenting on the Spanish Goalkeeper's Tears on YouTube

1. Introduction

On the video platform YouTube, we can observe a high frequency of positive face-related speech acts like the following, drawn from the discussion (YouTube 2010b) to a clip (YouTube 2010a) of Spanish national goalkeeper Iker Casillas who unexpectedly started crying in the final match of the World Cup 2010, when his teammate Andrés Iniesta scored the decisive goal:

casiiiiillassssssss eresss unico! lo vales demaciiadooo!un besito!
(*brendaensumundo*)

What is striking about this comment is that it is directly addressed at Casillas: we find his name, a verb in the second person and an affective greeting formula – in short, a direct address. Still, the comment seems to be addressed into nowhere. Social Media users are very likely aware of the fact that Casillas is not participating in this discussion. Hardly any of the users will expect a reaction from the goalkeeper. What sense does it make then to enhance the face of somebody who does not even take notice of it?

Research on politeness has, in the past few years, focused on impolite speech acts and aspects such as prosody and sequentiality. Positive politeness and face-enhancing acts have been theorised but not tested empirically. At the same time, research on computer-mediated communication (in the following, CMC) has often dealt with the assumed rudeness of CMC – “friendly” online communication is rarely the object of research. Yet Social Media provide an infinite corpus of more or less sequential conversations which can serve to revise the models based on face-to-face settings and help to understand the dynamics of online language use.

This contribution attempts to start filling this gap, focusing on face-enhancing acts in a Social Media setting, taking the user comments to the Casillas clip as a starting point. I will try to show that online comments towards celebrities are not gratuitous, but serve specific social face wants.

2. Paying Compliments – Offline and Online

In informal talks (and also in academic discussions) about online conversations, we often find the position that people tend to react very impolitely (cf. Kayany 1998: 1136). Online communication is said to be extremely rude. Suler enumerates six factors in CMC – dissociative anonymity, invisibility, asynchronicity, solipsistic introjection, dissociative imagination, and minimisation of authority (cf. Suler 2004: 322ff.) – which are responsible for the fact that participants feel less inhibition to verbal face threats or damages. He names the phenomenon the *online disinhibition effect* (Suler 2004: 321) and states that:

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We witness rude¹ language, harsh criticisms, anger, hatred, even threats. (Suler 2004: 321)

Even though it may be true that some conversations in Social Media applications abound in impolite speech acts, we can find many examples for the opposite case. Face-enhancing acts (in the following, FEA) seem to be a common strategy in discussions. People pay compliments to each other for funny status updates, beautiful vacation photos, pictures of cooked meals or helpful advice; they congratulate on birthdays, exams, weddings and childbirth; they console each other in case of illness, accidents or death. And they do not only act in this way toward their friends (who may as well be “virtual friends”, cf. Pietrini 2012: 165), but also toward celebrities or complete strangers. As Suler notes, the disinhibition may also affect the friendly sides of life:

Sometimes people share very personal things about themselves. They reveal secret emotions, fears, wishes. They show unusual acts of kindness and generosity, sometimes going out of their way to help others. We may call this *benign disinhibition*. (Suler 2004: 321)

This may be one reason why Social Media participants enhance other people’s face, despite the physical absence, even if they have never met and are not even online friends.

Holmes ranges compliments among the positive politeness devices described by Brown and Levinson (cf. Brown/Levinson 1987²), with a “positively affective function [...] reducing social distance

¹ Bousfield elaborates on the terms of rudeness and impoliteness, differentiating them in that impoliteness implies the speaker’s intent to damage the other’s face, while rudeness is an unintended face damage which is only perceived as such by the hearer (Bousfield 2010: 122ff.). Since the aim of this contribution is not to analyse impolite speech acts, I will not go further in detail.

² The high relevance of compliments for politeness research is discussed, amongst others, in Probst 2004.

and reinforcing solidarity between speaker and hearer” (Holmes 1988: 448):

A compliment is a speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed, for some ‘good’ (possession, characteristic, skill etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer. (Holmes 1988: 446)

While compliments are usually intended to meet the positive face wants of the hearer, interaction shows that they may as well be interpreted as a threat to the negative face: the speaker irrupts into the hearer’s private territory and constrains them to react in some adequate way (cf. Thaler 2012: 100). This is a ritual communicative frame applying to face-to-face conversation and many other forms of interaction. It prescribes that people should compliment one another more or less regularly to keep their relationship intact, and that a face-enhancing act should be followed by an act of acknowledgement (cf. Holmes 1988: 447; Herbert 1989: 5). Social Media does not make an exception: Most Social Media devices provide the possibility to comment on any kind of media content in order to show appreciation or support. Some users write long text messages, some place applauding or other positive emoticons, some click the “Like” or “thumbs-up” button. The act of acknowledgment can occur in the same way: Positive comments can also be rated with the “thumbs-up” button, or users write a thank-you note in reply. At least on YouTube, more elaborated reactions to compliments are rare and usually limited to cases where users share private content (like craft tutorials) and receive compliments for their effort. In the case of face enhancement towards celebrities, there is usually no acknowledgment, since the addressees cannot follow all online conversations concerning them, even if they

wanted to do so.³ Most fans or followers are aware of this and do not expect a reaction from celebrities when complimenting them.

It is by now a commonplace that CMC modes “impose conversational constraints on language users due principally to the lack of contextual cues” (Park 2008: 2051). Yet, research on CMC has shown since the late 90’s that linguistic online behaviour is “not primarily a characteristic of the medium, rather [...] social context dependent” (Kayany 1998: 1140). With regard to this, Park notes that “online discourse participants adapt to the CMC setting and employ a variety of creative communication devices to express sociointerpersonal content” (Park 2008: 2058). He also states that FTAs can occur in the same way in CMC as they do in face-to-face situations – and so do FEAs (Park 2008: 2055). In spite of the differences in concrete linguistic means that we can hardly overlook, CMC is not detached from our offline communication, and it is as well influenced by social and interactional context factors (Kayany 1998: 1141).

Two conditions are important for the communication of an FEA: the flattering must be non-ambiguous, and the addressee must understand that the FEA is directed to them. In Social Media, we can find many examples in which people make an effort to disambiguate the function and addressee of their FEA:

- mention the name (or pseudonym) of the addressee
- avoid means like irony
- repeat their compliments
- fill the compliments with positive attributes
- add smileys.

³ Some celebrities do interact with their fans or followers via Facebook pages, Twitter accounts or other applications. But many of them do it irregularly or have their account maintained by a Social Media manager, which is of course not the same as frequent personal contact. In the case discussed here, the video was uploaded by an anonymous YouTube user, so it is even more unlikely that the featured person will take notice of it.

Turning back to the initial posting addressed to Iker Casillas, I will now observe the special case of enhancing the face of someone who does not participate in the conversation. I suggest this has to do with a concept I will call 'shared face', which is itself related to the social identity of an individual. This concept has first been touched on by Goffman:

[...] in many relationships, the members come to share a face, so that in the presence of third parties an improper act on the part of one member becomes a source of acute embarrassment to the other members. (Goffman 1967: 42)

As Spencer-Oatey puts it,

[...] people have a fundamental belief that they are entitled to an association with others that is in keeping with the type of relationship that they have with them. This principle [...] seems to have three components: involvement (the principle that people should have appropriate amounts and types of "activity" involvement with others), empathy (the belief that people should share appropriate concerns, feelings and interests with others), and respect (the belief that people should show appropriate amounts of respectfulness for others). (Spencer-Oatey 2005: 100)

Tajfel defines "social identity" as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel 1974: 69; cf. also Tajfel/Turner 1979: 40). In the moment when an individual becomes aware of a specific element of their social identity, this element becomes part of the individual's face that they will want to save from threats. The interesting point here is that the individual does not only care for their own face, but for the face they share with all individuals belonging to the specific group.

When an element of the social identity is being derided, insulted, denigrated or in another way devaluated, the individual feels a face damage. In case the target to the damage is a person, people

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feel the face damage with the target person – they cringe, feel hurt, derided, or ashamed for the other. They share elements of their social identity with others and thus also share a face with regard to these elements. A face-related speech act towards a social identity element affects the face of all group members.

The effects of face work on shared face are not only evident in case of devaluation, but also in case of upvaluation. People feel proud, happy, euphoric, etc. when their social identity is positively touched indirectly through the *shared face*. Holmes provides an example from face-to-face communication which is a similar case of shared face enhancement:

[...] even when a compliment apparently refers to a third person it may well be indirectly complimenting the addressee, as (1) illustrates.

(1) *Context*: R's old schoolfriend is visiting and comments on one of the children's manners.

C(omplimenter) What a polite child!

R(ecipient) Thank you. We do our best.

The utterance can be interpreted as a compliment since it indirectly attributes credit to the addressee for good parenting. (Holmes 1988: 447)

The peer group identification may grow stronger as members compliment their shared face and thus reaffirm the group's solidarity. This might be one reason why people post positive comments regarding their social identity in Social Media: They feel as a part of a peer group, even if it is only a virtual one, and as such, they have the responsibility to contribute to the group's community feeling.⁴ Again, Kayany emphasises the strong connection between offline and online communicative behaviour:

⁴ An FEA towards a shared social identity element may also be interpreted as self-face enhancing, since it also means upvaluing an element of one's own face. Writing nice

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[...] the participants bring with them their social behavioural norms, cultural affinities, patriotic loyalties, and religious and national conflicts. (Kayany 1998: 1137)

The main difference between social behaviour offline and online might be that online groupings are far more disperse, which makes it harder to discern individual members.

3. Corpus Data

For the present contribution, I looked into the comments posted by August 2012 to the YouTube clip “Casillas llora despues del gol de Iniesta en la final - España vs Holanda 1-0” (YouTube 2010), the oldest dating from July 2010 (shortly after the final match of the World Cup), the newest from August 2012.⁵

17 comments had been hidden due to negative comments or spam suspicion.⁶ 10 comments had been eliminated because the authors had been deleted from YouTube (it is not clear whether they had deleted their accounts themselves or had been excluded by YouTube because of inappropriate behaviour). Finally, I deleted some of the remaining 734 comments since they were pure duplicates.

Since multiple pragmatic means are used in online communication, there is no reliable automated analysis tool for these matters by now. In order to classify the comments as FEA and to find pat-

things in Social Media does not only mean an altruistic act of enhancing the face of others, but also a face enhance for oneself.

⁵ YouTube does not provide precise dates neither for clips nor for comments.

⁶ These hidden comments being FTAs, they were not relevant for the corpus of this contribution on positive politeness and face enhancement. If someone decided to explore impolite communication on YouTube, it would of course be of great interest to analyse these comments with a high number of “thumbs-down” or “spam suspicion” clicks from other users, which means that the community has rated them especially impolite.

terns for different linguistic strategies, they must be read one by one and in context. In the following section, I will analyse the comments I classified as an FEA – in total 283.

4. Data Analysis

Glasford et al. name two important strategies to establish in-group harmony and identification: “[...] out-group derogation and activism to change the behaviour of the in-group” (Glasford et al. 2009: 420). These strategies are also present in the analysed YouTube comments. For the activism part, users turn out to be very creative, so I subdivided this strategy into five sub-strategies, which are, by order of frequency: *Indirect Compliment – Patriotism – Empathy – Compliment from Opponent – Direct Address*. The opponent-centred FEA strategy – named here *Deriding the Opponent* – is the least frequent, as shown in chart 1.

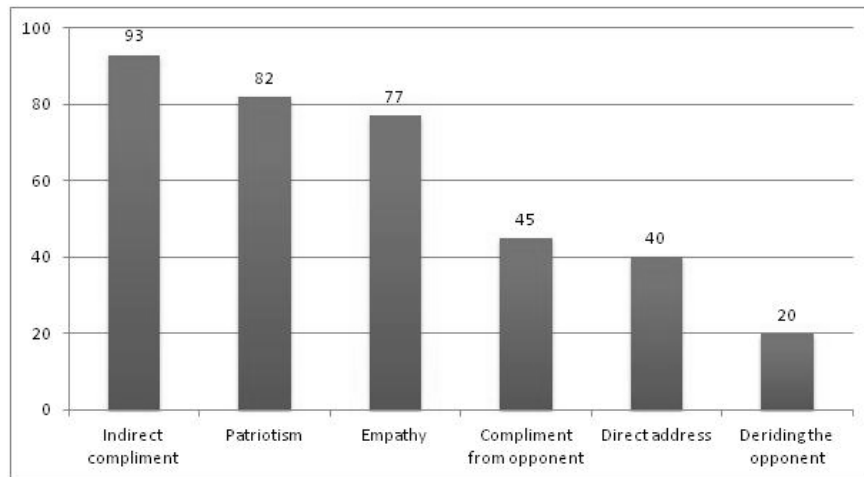


Chart 1: Distribution of FEA strategies in YouTube corpus

Users often combine these strategies. It is interesting to see that the three most important strategies are also those being the most frequently combined with each other (see chart 2).

Writing in CMC often does not follow the same orthography rules as written standard language. In the case of Spanish, the omission or displacement of diacritics is very typical, as well as a creative use of punctuation marks like the non-placement or dislocation of the double question and exclamation marks or the repetition of a punctuation mark. We also find repetitions of single letters or letter sequences.

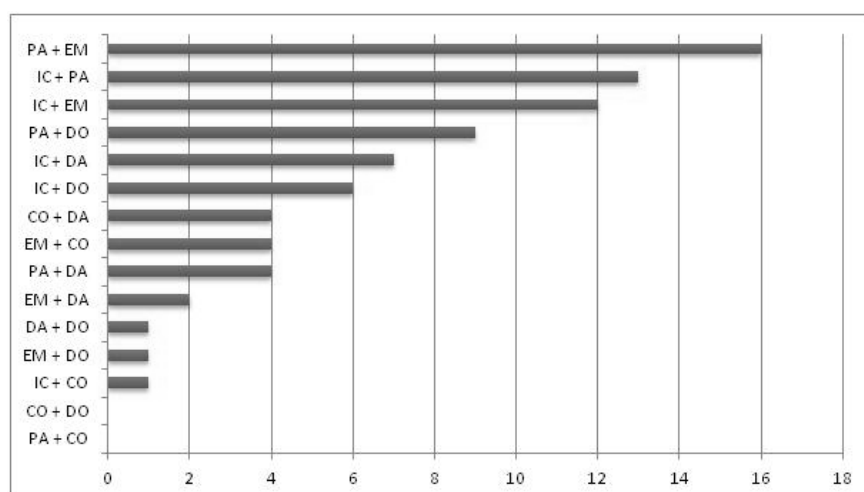


Chart 2: Combinations of FEA strategies in YouTube corpus (IC=Indirect Compliment, PA=Patriotism, EM=Empathy, CO=Compliment from Opponent, DA=Direct Address, DO=Deriding the Opponent)

Yet these online-specific linguistic means are not unmarked; they are mostly used to create emphasis and thereby show involvement. They are frequent in the YouTube corpus data, which is not surprising since speech acts related to social identity (FTAs as well as FEAs) affect the shared face of the users and imply emotional

involvement. In the following, I will focus on the linguistic means to create emphasis, in order to carve out how Spanish speakers do positive face work in Social Media.

5. Face-Enhancing Strategies on YouTube

5.1. Indirect Compliment

The most frequent strategy is to say positive things about Casillas or the Spanish team, mostly in the 3rd person.

- (1) IKER CASILLAS SERÁ EL MEJOR POR SIEMPRE.
(*bichioeurovisivo8*)
- (2) el mejor portero del mundo!!! (*moonyHale*)
- (3) Casillas es hermosisisisisisisisimooooo-ooooo,bueno como todos los españoles !!! Abundan los chicos guapos en mi pais Viva España
(*BellaSevillana*)
- (4) es que es lo menos que podía hacer, llorar. viva la madre que parió a san iker casillas (*enrique12972*)
- (5) IKER ES DIOS! (*jesusc7505*)

The first two examples look quite similar, both using the superlative of the positive adjective *bueno*, and both using terms with maximal extension (*por siempre, del mundo*) to express their estimation of the goalkeeper. To emphasise their comment, they use different strategies available to online users: The first writes all in upper case letters, which is a common online writing practice to simulate a loud voice and thus high emotional involvement. The second writes in lower case letters, but adds three exclamation marks, which have about the same effect.

We find the exclamation marks again in comment 3. Furthermore, *BellaSevillana* emphasises the superlative *hermosísimo* by repeating

several times the stressed penultimate syllable (once adding another *i*, but this might be a typing error) and reduplicating many times the final vowel *o*. Both means do probably not represent simulation of prosodic stress: the last vowel is not stressed or lengthened when pronounced; the penultimate syllable might be stressed but would not be repeated. We may consider this as a typical feature of written language in online contexts, especially in Social Media.

Comments 4 and 5 feature emphasis by religious allusions: Casillas is called a saint (*san Iker*) and even God (*Dios*).

5.2. Patriotism

Patriotism means here that the person expands the context of the event to national relevance. Again, the person reveals the event as relevant to their social identity, but also as part of shared face, since they assume the whole nation to feel the same.

- (6) Eran las lagrimas de toda España.....nos lo merecíamos todos..pero por encima de todo..el
El mejor jugador del mundial tenia k ser el...k grande Casillas
(*akasha737*)
- (7) Felicidades Españoles. you deserved it. Fue mi favorito desde el principio. Gano el mejor futbol duelale a quien le duela. QUE VIVA ESPAÑA carajo!!!! (*anadisi02*)
- (8) Al verlo llorar rompi en llanto muy copiosamente, entretanto veíamos el trigunfo de nuestro lado entiendo la razon de sus lagrimas y el sendero para llegar a ese momento, detras de toda la historia entre las luces esparcidas al atardecer en el alma de esta final que ahora cayo ante nuestra patria, la promesa y el anhelo eran una lucha entre la realidad y los sueños una puesta en escena donde España se hizo grande! al fin somos campeones del mundo! Dios bendiga a España! (*Andy77mx*)

(9) ViVa EsPaña KopoNN que Grandes SomoSS (*elvaqui*)

In many of these examples we find a focus on the in-group. This is expressed by the frequent use of pronouns and verb forms of the 1st person plural (*nos lo merecíamos, veíamos, nuestro lado, nuestra patria, somos campeones*).

It is typical of football fans to speak of their group as a whole even when they are talking about very individual feelings and to project the team's success on themselves. In the case of the national teams, the in-group is supposed not only to be some football fans, but the whole nation. This is obvious in the shown comments using ritual and religious formulae to enhance the self-esteem of the nation (*que viva España, Dios bendiga a España*). Again, writing in upper case letters simulates loudness and signifies a high level of emotional involvedness. *Elvaqui* plays with this device interchanging loosely upper and lower case letters, which gives the written words an inconvenient appearance and emphasises them.

The ritual formulae make these comments ambivalent. They are not only FEAs toward the in-group, strengthening the group feeling of Spanish football fans, but they are also indirect face threats against fans of other national teams. The explosive force of these formulae and of the use of exclusive “we” often leads to fierce debates among patriotic football fans, mostly leading away from the subject of the clip – Iker Casillas crying.

5.3. Empathy

Showing empathy means enhancing the face of all those who share a specific face element. Unlike the Patriotism strategy expanding the narrow individual perspective to a supposed large group, the Empathy strategy focuses on the individual's self. Many commenters personalise the event and talk about their own feelings regarding this shared social identity element.

(10) q hermosoo!!!! me hizo llorar a mi (*eria89*)

(11) el empezo a llorar anoche y yo tambien con el. fue magico ese momento, cuando casi todos empesaron a llorar. <333333 (*tegritoamor18*)

(12) me conmueven esos 8 segundos (*altDIY*)

The frequent use of the 1st person singular in many of these comments shifts the focus on the feelings of the commenter. Again, we find a combination of common means and typical pragmatic elements from online communication to show empathy: use of positive adjectives (*hermoso, mágico*), emotion verbs (*llorar, conmove*), graphic emphasis (multiple exclamation marks, vowel reduplication as in *hermosoo*), graphic ASCII-art (<3 as a pictogram for a heart, combined with graphic emphasis when the 3 is multiplied).

5.4. Compliment from Opponent

A subtype of the compliment worth mentioning in a paragraph *à part* is the compliment from the out-group. It is the users themselves who draw the line between in-group and out-group according to their own perception. In this specific case analysed here, the in-group consists in the first instance of Spanish football fans, who often expand their in-group on all Spanish people. The out-group is constructed from non-football fans and fans of other countries' national teams:

(13) ya hace un año. Bien merecida la copa para españa. con esa seleccion que tiene era logico que serian campeones!! Saludos desde mexico. (*sonnyIDI*)

(14) iker casillas el mejor de todos... Saludos hermanos españoles paso por aqui un Argentino (*siempreuniluso21*)

(15) yo soy uruguayo y admito es el mejor golero del mundo!! (*adrianixman*)

This type of comments abounds in hyperbolic praise of Casillas. Many users close their comment with a greeting formula, which is not very common in YouTube comments and thereby a special act of positive politeness towards the Spanish fans.

The in-group can be subdivided into fans of Iker Casillas more specifically as a player of the Spanish football club Real Madrid and fans of the National team, but not of Madrid. Here are some examples for this case:

- (16) amo al barcelona!.....pero el primer arquero q marco mi juventus y q me dio esa remota idea de se arquero siempre fue....Iker Casillas!....el mejor arquero de España de todos los tiempo!!.....hala Casillas (*renxo17*)
- (17) Soy un fan de barcelona Casillas is the best es el mejor del mundo no soy un fan de madrid pero si de Casillas. (*Zpaceboy77*)
- (18) Iker eres el mejor!!! te lo dice un aficionado del barcelona! (*nicolasrod*)

Many users declare themselves members of the out-group and add their compliment, either toward the Spanish team or toward Casillas. Receiving a compliment from the out-group must be perceived as an even more enhancing act to the shared face of the in-group, since such a speech act comprises a self-devaluation of the out-group and a confirmation for the in-group that their self-esteem is justified.

Beyond the strategy of double hyperbolic speech, declaring Casillas as best keeper of all times, there is an enhancement strategy that we have not mentioned yet: the use of English elements in 17. The user switches between Spanish and English, probably feeling that this language-mixing will highlight the comment, since they simply repeat the same content in Spanish.

5.5. Direct Address

An interesting type of shared face FEA is the direct address of the person in question. The improbability that this person will even read this comment is a sign that the FEA is not really directed at them, but rather at others sharing this element of social identity. In the following examples, either the name (Iker Casillas) is mentioned or the goalkeeper is addressed through the personal pronoun of the 2nd person sg.

(19) lagrimas de felicidad,iker eres un grande maestro,hala madrid..SAN IKER. (*ztereozizou*)

(20) QE GRANDEEEEE ERESS CASILLASSS TODOSSS LLORAMOSSS CONTIGOOO (*molisnow*)

(21) iker el mejor portero del mundo ! si señor ! eres el mejor casillas el MEJOR ! (*Eveliinaa1995*)

(22) TE QUIERO IKER (*BuyoIker*)

(23) casillas eres el puto amo gracias (*cicovic2*)

The enhancement here is made obvious by usual means: positive adjectives (*grande, mejor*) or nouns (*maestro, amo, felicidad*), exaggeration (*te quiero, mejor del mundo, todos*). We find again sanctification (*San Iker*) and intensification by use of a word with negative connotation in a positive sense (*puto*), both expressive strategies to increase the effect of the comment.

In addition, we see typical means of online communication, known from e-mail, chat, and message boards: writing in upper case to imitate shouting, multiplication of letters to emphasise the words they belong to. We can assume that in the case of vowel multiplication, it also means imitation of an extended pronunciation, but in the case of consonants, this is less probable. In *molisnow*'s example, *grandeeee* and *contigooo* might be the written representation of an extended pronunciation (even if we would expect it rather on the stressed penultimate syllable), whereas *Casillasss*,

todosss and *lloramosss* are probably only emphases using the same graphic means, but without an oral model.

5.6. Deriding the Opponent

An ambivalent strategy is open derision of the in-group's opponent. To the in-group, drawing the line of membership may serve as a strengthening act. To the out-group, this is an affront, an FTA.

(24) Lora por que le faltaban 30 sg para llegar a los penaltis, como no va a llorar.

Casillas es un superhombre, 3 minutos antes acaba de realizar la mejor parada del mundial ante el calvorota holandes ese que no me acuerdo como se llama. (*cineaccion3*)

(25) sii hubiiera ganado holanda hubiera sigoo injuustoo !!
porquuee nuestroo juuegooo fuuee limpiooo no komo el de ellooss!!
que lo unico que hacian era dar patadaaas!!
VIIVAAAAA EESPAÑAAAAA!!!!!!!!!!!!!! viivaaaaaaa
CASIILLAAAAAAS quee sus lagrimas representan
las de todos los españoleeees!! (*BeeiittaaySuusii*)

In these examples, the opponent is the Dutch national football team, and due to the concept of shared face, also all of its supporters. In 24, we find an allusion to Dutch footballer Arjen Robben, clearly an insult: *calvorota*, which reduces the player to his head's appearance and depersonalises him, since he is not called by his name. The Dutch team is denigrated in 25, saying that their game was not *limpio*, i.e. not appropriate; and again, much emotion is transported in the repeated letters. From the forth line on, there are only vowels repeated, which makes a concrete phonetic lengthening possible. The wording (praising the own team, naming a player) is typical of football chants. This commenter takes the derision of the opponent to the extreme by simulating the humiliating stadium situation.

It is no wonder that many comments of this order receive replies from annoyed users who feel a damage of their shared face. Not all of the answers are direct replies to the initial comment, but users often refer to previous posters or to the overall bad atmosphere in the previous comments. In fact, the totality of comments shows a majority of FTAs, mostly reactions to face damage even though the derogating strategy is not very frequent – but it obviously has the strongest effect on the shared face of the out-group. This is linguistic evidence for the above mentioned social psychological findings that derision of someone else's social identity strengthens people's identity feeling on both sides, often leading the attacked group to defend their shared face or to counterattack.

6. Concluding Remarks

This contribution is based on the assumption that the world of Social Media is not detached from communication in offline settings. People have a social identity and thereby seek to keep their *shared face* intact – offline as well as online.⁷ If their social identity is attacked by a negative online comment, it does not matter for people from the hurt group whether they know the offender or whether thousands of miles separate them from each other – they still feel offended. Just like in their offline life, people feel the need to enhance their own and other people's face online. They send positive comments to users they have never met, on the basis that the others share a specific element of their social identity.

⁷ I assume that online activities are nowadays part of real life, and that the argument "It does not matter, it is only virtual" is no longer valid. This implies that the facets of identity which users create in online spaces are facets of a real identity related to a real person's real experiences (see also Fröhlich in this volume).

A fundamental difference between the offline and the online world is that people can exchange on their specific interests independent from distance and time. The groups that people belong to are potentially larger and may spread all over the world. So people may watch a football match on television and celebrate the players with a small group of friends, and they may as well rewatch the best scenes on YouTube and celebrate the players together with thousands of other internet users who share this social identity element. In both cases, the individuals demonstrate solidarity with others and strengthen their feeling of belonging to a group. This enhances the shared face of the group and the individuals' self face at the same time. Once more, this behaviour suggests that offline and online spaces are closely linked to one another – people tend to interpret unspecific face work actions as individually directed to them, even in vast groups whose structure is unclear, like online communities.

In my corpus of YouTube comments, users of the Spanish language make use of six main strategies to send out an FEA related to shared face. These strategies – five in-group related, one out-group related – have been presented above. The most important linguistic means to create emphasis in the comments are:

- graphic means:
 - playing with graphemes, mixing upper and lower case characters
 - economic spelling
 - iteration of single graphemes or punctuation marks
- lexical means:
 - syllable iteration
 - hyperbolic speech, positive and emotional semantics
 - sanctification

- pragmatic means:
 - personal focus on the individual
 - focus on the in-group
 - focus on the element of shared face (by mentioning the name)
 - focus on the relationship between in-group and out-group
 - ritual formulae

Since this analysis is based on a small corpus, these findings cannot be generalised. Further research on FEAs in Social Media with regard to different aspects is necessary. I suggest that some of the strategies presented here (notably patriotism) would play a less significant role in other contexts, leaving place to strategies that could not be observed here. It would be interesting to observe comment threads related to content which does not provoke many FTAs, like fashion and beauty clips. The fact that Social Media are often plurilingual and populated by individuals speaking different languages (cf. Locher/Bolander, this volume) may be of interest for contrastive politeness research.

The phenomenon of the troll (an individual deliberately disturbing a harmonious online conversation with inappropriate comments, cf. Kluge, this volume) would also be an interesting subject due to its relation to both Social Media and politeness matters. It could also be enlightening to observe whether and how individuals attempt to solve miscommunication online to prevent themselves and others from face damage. Analysing metacommunication about the “correct” behaviour in an online setting would provide further clues to the applicability of traditional politeness conventions and models to the CMC context.

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Relational Work and the Display of Multilingualism in Two Facebook Groups

1. Introduction

In this paper on data taken from the social network site Facebook in 2008 and 2009, we explore the research interface between politeness theory and identity construction within interpersonal pragmatics (Locher/Graham 2010: 2). Our aim is to understand better how two particular groups of Facebook users employ language in status updates (SU) and responses to status updates (RSU) when creating a persona online. Lee (2011) for Facebook and Zappavigna (2012) for Twitter speak of status updates or tweets as instances of micro-blogging, i.e. “short messages on the web designed for self-reporting about what one is doing, thinking, or feeling at any moment” (Lee 2011: 111), and consider them as contributing to “an ongoing performance of identity” (Zappavigna 2012: 38; cf. also Jones/Schieffelin/Smith 2011: 2012). Building on previous research (Bolander/Locher 2010; in press), our special focus lies on the use of more than one language code in Facebook status updates. In particular, we wish to explore how code-switching, as one means through which multilingualism is performed, is displayed in the SUs and RSUs and where we can find

links to relational work and identity construction. Example (1) is a case in point:

- (1) SU: E Peter is full of sunshine, euphoria and bliss. yay!
 RSU1: SG “chani o eini ha? ;)” [posted by Manuel]
 RSU2: SG muesch aber z’erscht e bitz durch d’höll damit sie iifahrt :) [posted by Peter]
 RSU3: SG chönnti gloubs grad mithaute...samstag umher? sind im x [posted by Manuel]
 RSU4: G wir im presswerk bei toni rios, kommt doch nachher [posted by Peter]
 RSU5: G klingt nicht mal so übel, mal sehen [posted by Manuel]
 RSU1: SG ‘can I also have one? ;)’ [posted by Manuel]
 RSU2: SG ‘first you need to go through hell a bit so that it can kick in properly :) [posted by Peter]
 RSU3: SG ‘I think I qualify...around on Saturday? we’re at the x’ [posted by Manuel]
 RSU4: G ‘we’ll be in the [restaurant name and singer], why don’t you come by afterwards’ [posted by Peter]
 RSU5: G ‘doesn’t sound bad, we’ll see’ [posted by Manuel]

In (1), the Swiss German¹ (SG) and Standard German (G) speaking Facebooker Peter shares his state of happiness with his Facebook friends in a status update composed in English, thus projecting a happy persona. This status update triggers five responses which make up a conversation between Peter and his friend Manuel. RSU1 is written in Swiss German and humorously (as indicated by the smiley ;)) implies that Peter’s feeling of bliss must be drug/cigarette induced. Peter responds – in Swiss German – that

¹ We use the term ‘Swiss German’ as an umbrella term to refer to the many Swiss dialects. It does not denote a single variety of German.

Manuel first has to go through hell so that the effect can take proper hold (RSU2). This is followed by a comment by Manuel, in Swiss German, who confirms that he qualifies. Switching to Standard German, he then asks whether Peter is available to meet off-line on Saturday. The final two RSUs in (1) are written in Standard German and negotiate a potential meeting at the weekend.

Depicted in (1) is a brief interaction in Standard German and Swiss German, triggered by a status update in English. We argue that we not only see several languages employed here, but that this display of multilingualism can also be exploited for identity construction. In order to explore this interface, the paper begins by positioning our project within theoretical approaches to the relational aspect of language use, and then reports on previous findings with respect to Facebook and our project in particular. We then proceed to discuss the occurrence and functions of code-switching before linking this question back to identity construction and theory building.

2. Relational work, politeness theory and identity construction

The theoretical interest we take in this paper is embedded within 'interpersonal pragmatics'. The term is "used to designate examinations of interactions between people that both affect and are affected by their understandings of culture, society, and their own and others' interpretations" with the aim of shedding light on the interpersonal/relational side of linguistic interaction (Locher/Graham 2010: 2). Interpersonal pragmatics aims at better understanding how people create relational effects in their situated contexts by engaging in 'relational work', i.e. "all aspects of the work in-

vested by individuals in the construction, maintenance, reproduction and transformation of interpersonal relationships among those engaged in social practice” (Locher/Watts 2008: 96).

The fact that there is a relational side to communication is well-established. Early research by Watzlawick/Beavin/Jackson (1967) highlights that there is a relational side in addition to an ideational side of language, and work in systemic functional linguistics by Halliday (e.g. 1978) has made the interpersonal side one of its pillars (next to the ideational and textual). Politeness research has also made the relational aspect of communication its central focus by introducing the notion of *face* and *face work* (cf. Goffman 1967; Brown/Levinson 1987; for overviews of the development of politeness research cf. Locher 2012; 2013). Goffman’s work (e.g., 1967) in particular deals with how people interact with each other, how they form in-groups and out-groups, and how they thus position themselves vis-à-vis each other. Politeness research and work on identity construction thus share the fundamental interest in the relational side of language use.

By following Bucholtz and Hall (2005: 587), who claim that identity “is intersubjectively rather than individually produced and interactionally emergent rather than assigned in an a priori fashion”, we pursue an understanding of identity that perceives it as fundamentally in flux and shaped in interaction (cf. also Mendoza-Denton 2002; Joseph 2004; Locher 2008). While many variables, such as age, ethnicity, socio-economic background, sex, schooling and appearance are important for identity construction, language is a central resource. A concept that helps us to pinpoint aspects of this identity construction is ‘positioning’, drawn from Davies and Harré’s (1990) work on narratives: “Positioning [...] is the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines” (Davies/Harré 1990: 46). Creating an identity

thus involves “the social positioning of self and other” (Bucholtz/Hall 2005: 586) in a particular situated context. This positioning can be explicit or implicit, and is fundamentally relational since ties between interactants are created and recreated, shaped, challenged and confirmed. Thurlow and Mroczek (2011: xxxiv) observe that “[n]o identity work happens outside of, or without a view to, relationships; acts of identity are also always acts of comparison, social distinction, and othering.” This latter point best brings home the connection between relational work and identity construction (Locher 2008).

In studying relational work and identity construction in data taken from computer-mediated communication (CMC), more specifically from the social network site Facebook, we are forced to ask ourselves whether we need to draw on different research tools. Androutsopoulos (2006: 420-421) points out that research on CMC has undergone several research stages already. In early literature, researchers attempted to find *the* language of the Internet (e.g. Crystal 2006), and they highlighted the influence of the technical medium on language use, thereby largely neglecting its social components. This important early research has now been refined and is complemented by taking into account “the interplay of technological, social, and contextual factors in the shaping of computer-mediated language practices, and the role of linguistic variability in the formation of social interaction and social identities on the Internet” (Androutsopoulos 2006: 421). The focus has thus shifted from large “listings of ‘prototypical’ features” of particular practices to a “user and community-centered approach” (Androutsopoulos 2006: 430; cf. also Herring 2007 and 2013; Thurlow/Mroczek 2011).

By concentrating on two focus groups of Facebook users, we are interested in exploring the particularities of their language use in this specific medium. While acknowledging that the computer-

mediated environment might shape interaction and that it affords interactants a novel means of communication, we also believe that it is legitimate to draw on established linguistic tools derived from research on ‘offline settings’ in order to grasp interaction online. This understanding also highlights that it has become difficult to separate the creation of offline and online identities in a clear-cut way (cf. e.g., Donath 1999; Turkle 1995 and 1996; Lee 2011). Especially in the case of social networks sites such as Facebook, we can indeed often speak of “anchored relationships” (Zhao/Grasmuck/Martin 2008), which are grounded in offline social realities (cf. also Ellison/Steinfeld/Lampe 2007; Lewis et al. 2008; Mayer/Puller 2008; Lee 2011).² These “anchored relationships” are important for the multilingual language practices we observed in our data. We also believe that face concerns are never suspended in interaction – no matter what communicative channel is used – and that relational work is hence also at play in interactions where no face-to-face interaction takes place. Before presenting results demonstrating this, we will first describe our data and the acts of positioning we established therein in previous work.

3. Identity construction and positioning in two Facebook focus groups

Facebook can be defined as a social network site (SNS). Following Boyd and Ellison (2007), SNSs are

² However, nowadays it is also possible and common to join interest groups in social network sites such as Facebook. These group members do not necessarily know each other offline.

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web-based services that allow individuals to

- 1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system,
- 2) articulate a list of other users ['friends'] with whom they share a connection, and
- 3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (Boyd/Ellison 2007)

On Facebook, account holders construct a public or semi-public profile and they become 'friends' with other Facebook users, an act which generally enables them to view and navigate one another's personal profiles and walls. Although we are now (in 2012) witnessing an increase in Facebook pages run by organisations and in practices based on participation in interest groups, generally it is still fair to claim that "SNSs are primarily organised around people, not interests"; in creating a Facebook account, an individual constructs a "personal (or 'egocentric') network" (Boyd/Ellison 2007).

Facebook can be considered a multi-modal SNS, which offers users the opportunity for both synchronous (e.g., chat) and asynchronous (e.g., writing an SU or RSU) communication. In this paper, we are interested in two asynchronous strongly text-based activities, the authoring of SUs and RSUs, although we acknowledge the importance of taking multi-modal data into account (Thurlow/Mroczek 2011: xxv) and discuss aspects thereof elsewhere (Bolder/Locher 2010). In our analysis of these activities, we worked with two focus groups: FG-S and FG-UK. FG-S is constituted by a group of ten individuals who are living in Switzerland, mainly students and young professionals; FG-UK is a group of ten students who were studying in the UK at the time of data collection (December 2008-January 2009). While the focus groups are labelled according to the interlocutors' place of residence, we do not treat nationality as a variable.

Our selection of these two groups was motivated by our access to them (the Swiss group is constituted by our own friends and we managed to get into contact with the UK group through a public post to a mailing list run by a university in the north of England) and our aim to have comparable data (students and young professionals). For ethical reasons, we obtained permission to use the information posted by our informants on their personal profile pages and Facebook walls and used pseudonyms for all participants (cf. Herring 1996; Eysenbach/Till 2001; Ess/AoIR ethics working committee 2002; Bolander/Locher 2013). In selecting data that was posted prior to our contact with our informants we managed to avoid the observer's paradox. To choose the two groups we work with in this paper (overall we have 74 participants in the Swiss data set and 58 in the UK data set) we focused on one anchor person from each of the two larger data sets and then selected nine of their friends. These nine other individuals were chosen on the basis of the number of mutual friends they had with the anchor person. By proceeding in this manner we were able to locate a (loose) community of practice (Eckert/McConnell-Ginet 1992).

Although we downloaded all information posted on the individuals' personal profile pages and their walls, in this paper we focus on status updates (N=474) and reactions to status updates (N=795). At the time of data collection, the SUs were triggered with the prompt 'What are you doing now?' and the name of the updater was already provided in the entry field. Our motivation to analyse SUs is based on the fact that they are the most prominent type of action performed by the Facebook account holders on their own walls. As outlined in Bolander/Locher (2010; in press), individuals execute twelve different action types on their walls, including, for example, accepting gifts, uploading photos and creating groups. In our previous research, we managed to identify a total of 481

actions in FG-S and 673 in FG-UK. Out of these 227 (47%, FG-S) and 247 (37%, FG-UK) were SUs. While not all of the twenty participants were active authors of SUs (two participants in FG-S did not write any at all), we kept all twenty individuals in our study. Ties between participants were seen as more important than the number of SUs each participant wrote, and, in addition, all participants, whether they author SUs or not, are part of the 'audience' for whom the SUs are written. Since our analysis of the data made manifest that reacting to a status update also constitutes an important practice on Facebook, we decided to include an analysis of the RSUs. In doing so, we were able to explore emergent interactions and to reflect upon these in light of identity construction.

Before turning to the results of our analysis of the display of code-switching and potential ties to relational work and identity work, it is worth briefly summarising what we previously researched with regard to identity construction in Facebook. Our earlier research, presented in Bolander/Locher (2010) and Bolander/Locher (in press), constitutes the foundation on which the current study rests. To research identity construction in SUs, we started out with a bottom-up qualitative analysis of the 474 status updates. On the basis of a close content analysis, we developed second order labels of acts of positioning.³ Examples (2) and (3) show two such second order labels: 'Work' and 'relationship'.

(2) Lauren has finally finished semester one ... woop woop!

(3) Sarah is engaged to John! yay!

The act of positioning in (2) was labelled as 'work', since the SU foregrounds Lauren's identity as that of a student and the one in (3) as 'relationship', since Sarah emphasises her engagement to

³ The coder agreement was at 80 percent and any remaining problems were resolved after discussion between the two authors.

John. As the examples show, the acts can be explicit (as in 3) or implicit (as in 2). Work and relationship are two of five main categories of acts of positioning. In addition to work, which includes SUs in which an individual indexes their employment or studies, and 'relationship' in which interlocutors reference relationships with other parties, we identified 'pastime', i.e., references to things someone does in their free time, like reading, shopping, going out, 'personality', i.e., references to an individual's state of mind or character traits like being sad or happy, and 'humour'. In the case of the latter, we argued that in authoring a humorous SU an individual positions themselves as humorous. Although humour could have been subsumed under the broader heading of personality, its salience in the data warranted treating it as a separate category. In coding the SUs, we allowed for double labelling. Thus, in the case of (2) above, in addition to being labelled as 'work', the SU is also coded as 'personality', since the exclamation *woop woop* at the end of the SU signals the interlocutor's happiness at this particular moment in time. The same is true for Example (3), as the first statement is followed with the exclamation *yay!*.

Although there were certain idiosyncratic differences (cf. Bolander/Locher in press for a discussion), the systematic coding of the data showed that personality acts of positioning were the most prominent, followed by pastime, humour, work and relationship. For both focus groups the order was the same as was, strikingly, the frequencies of the acts. Thus, in FG-S (N=451), 45% of the SUs contained identity claims about personality; in FG-UK (N=649) the frequency was 46%. Similarly, pastime was 27% in FG-S and 25% in FG-UK, humour was 10% in both focus groups, work 8% in FG-S and 10% in FG-UK and relationship was 9% in both. For both groups, highlighting components of one's personality emerges as a

particularly important act which individuals perform through the authoring of SUs.

As a second step, we analysed how the RSUs respond to the identity claims made in the SUs. We thereby aimed to explore the *co*-construction of identity in accordance with our understanding of identity as intersubjectively produced (Bucholtz/Hall 2005: 587). We only focused on the first RSU (N=224). This methodological decision was motivated by the fact that the first RSU (in instances where there are more than one) creates an immediate link to the SU, whereas further RSUs are not necessarily tied to the original SU, but can instead take up issues raised in preceding RSUs.

In analysing the relationship between the SUs and the RSUs, we coded for four possibilities: 1) the SU receives no response, 2) the RSU confirms the identity claims made in the SU, 3) the RSU challenges the identity claims made in the SU, and 4) the RSU neither confirms nor challenges but makes other, further or new identity claims about the writer of the SU. The last category could also contain cases which were unclear with regard to identity claims. The results of this analysis made manifest that in 51% (FG-S, N=227)⁴ and 49% (FG-UK, N=247) of all cases the SU receives no response at all. Where an SU does receive a response, the tendency is for the RSU to confirm identity claims made by SU writers. This was the case for 33% of the RSUs in FG-S and 38% in FG-UK; again the frequencies are similar. In only 5% (FG-S) and 3% (FG-UK) of all instances did RSU authors challenge identity claims made by SU writers. Finally, 10% of the RSUs for both groups can be categorised as other. The strong presence of confirmations in both FG-S and FG-UK relative to challenges warrants concluding that individuals writing RSUs predominantly perform supportive relational work. The fact that 10% of the RSUs do something else than

⁴ As we recall, more than one act of positioning can be performed within a single SU.

confirm or challenge identity claims made in the SUs suggests that further more fine-grained research on the ‘other’ category is needed.

Overall, our theoretical approach (post-structuralist understanding of identity as co-constructed) and methodological approach (qualitative and quantitative analysis of SUs and RSUs) allowed us to develop a catalogue of acts of positioning, to identify tendencies with regard to the types of identity claims made, and to observe that supportive relational work is more prominent than challenges and other types of claims in RSUs in the case of our two focus groups.⁵ What we did not take into account in this study though was the languages interlocutors drew on when performing identity; nor did we consider potential links between code-switching and relational work and identity construction. We have now added to the original study by incorporating this new angle, which we will discuss in the following section.

⁵ In Bolander/Locher 2010, we also established what the status updates achieved from a more general perspective. In sequence of importance, the resulting categories were: State of mind (happy, angry, ...); Reference to action in progress; Reference to future action; Reflection on past events; Report on state of body; Report on location (S is in ...); Reference to completed action; Reference to likes; Expression of desire; Identity claim; Request for help/advice; Offer recommendations/advice; Send wishes; Quotation; Response; Metacomment on SU; Advertising something; Express thanks/gratification; Apologise; Reference to dislikes. This is comparable to Lee’s 2011 study which found that her 20 bilingual English-Cantonese Facebook friends also engaged in the following acts: “What are you doing right now?”; Everyday life; Opinion and judgment; Reporting mood; Away message; Initiating discourse; Addressing target audience; Quotation; Silence and interjection; Humour. While this paper is not the place to go into an in-depth comparison, it is nevertheless striking that many categories overlap.

4. Multilingual language display and code-switching in the two Facebook focus groups

The topic of code-switching (CS), understood as the “juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems” (Gumperz 1982: 59), is the newest area of research we have focused on in connection with our study of language use in SUs and RSUs. To a large extent, this research on code-switching is exploratory, since there is paucity of studies on code-switching in CMC. As Androutsopoulos (2013: 667) maintains, however, “[t]his marginalisation of CS bears no relation to the spread of the practice itself”. Indeed, “[g]iven the importance of multilingualism and the pervasiveness of digital media worldwide, it seems safe to assume that digitally-mediated communication [...] offers opportunities for written CS at an unprecedented scale” (Androutsopoulos 2013: 667).

In reviewing existing literature on the various discourse functions of code-switching in different modes of CMC, Androutsopoulos (2013: 681) identifies eight:

- a) switching for formulaic discourse purposes, including greetings, farewells, and good wishes;
- b) switching in order to perform culturally-specific genres such as poetry or joketelling;
- c) switching to convey reported speech (as opposed to the writer’s own speech);
- d) switching with repetition of an utterance for emphatic purposes;
- e) switching to index one particular addressee, to respond to language choices by preceding contributions, or to challenge other participants’ language choices;

- f) switching to contextualise a shift of topic or perspective, to distinguish between facts and opinion, information and affect, and so on;
- g) switching to mark what is being said as jocular or serious, and to mitigate potential face-threatening acts, for example through humorous CS in a dispreferred response or a request;
- h) switching to or from the interlocutor's code to index consent or dissent, agreement and conflict, alignment and distancing, and so on. (Androutsopoulos 2013: 681)

In addition to the identification of these central functions, Androutsopoulos (2013: 683) highlights the importance of code-switching in connection with identity construction, noting thereby that through a “pragmatically informed micro-analysis of CS in CMC” we can “identify how different codes in a group's usage take on pragmatic functions and identity values, which cannot be assumed *a priori* based on the wider cultural associations of these languages”. This is in line with the approach to relational work and identity outlined in Section 2, where we also emphasise the importance of locally made judgments in social practice.

In this paper, we are interested in both the performance of code-switching in SUs and RSUs, and in potential links between code-switching and relational work and identity construction. This dual interest is reflected in our research questions: How is code-switching displayed in the SUs and RSUs? Where can we find links to relational work and identity construction?

To answer these questions we conducted an analysis of the 474 SUs and 795 RSUs. For each SU and RSU we coded for the presence/absence of different languages. In addition, we coded for switches between SUs and RSUs. This decision was data driven, as we recognised that there are many cases in which the switch does not occur within an SU or an RSU but between the two turns. This finding (which we will discuss below) highlights the need to conceptualise code-switching in Facebook as both individually pro-

duced and co-constructed. In this sense, code-switching can be considered a form of ‘joint action’ in the sense of Clark (1996: 3), i.e., as “one that is carried out by an ensemble of people acting in coordination with each other”. In what follows we will present the quantitative findings with respect to the occurrence of multilingualism and code-switching to better glean central tendencies. We will illustrate these tendencies with examples that allow us to also discuss the functions of these displays of language competence.

We started by focusing on the languages used in the status updates, so as to have an overview of the first part, or initial ‘turn’ of the interaction. While we considered dialects in the German data, and distinguished between Swiss German and Standard German (we also found an instance of Bavarian), we did not differentiate between ‘dialects’ or ‘registers’ in the English data. This decision is based on the fact that we were not able to pick up dialect features in English writing in a reliable way since at times we might be merely dealing with non-standard spelling rather than the use of dialects. In the case of the distinction between Swiss German and Standard German,⁶ we could draw on spelling, lexicon and syntax, and the long tradition of writing in the different Swiss German dialects. Table 1 shows the various languages contained in the 227 FG-S and 247 FG-UK SUs.

As shown in Table 1, code-switching is predominantly used by individuals in the Swiss focus group. While English and German are the most frequently occurring varieties, these ten interlocutors draw on other languages too, a finding which likely reflects their language competence. In connection with identity construction,

⁶ All Swiss German speakers have Standard German available as a written and oral communication form. Standard German is learnt in kindergarten and at school (or picked up in the media before this) and is used in official contexts such as the school or parliament. Friends would usually address each other in dialect in face-to-face contexts, while it is customary to write in Standard German. There is, however, a long tradition of dialect writing for personal communication, poetry or literature.

the results show that the Swiss focus group projects a more multi-lingual group identity than the UK focus group.

Language	FG-S (n=227)	%	FG-UK (n=247)	%
English (EN)	186	81.9	245	99.2
Standard German	34	15		
Swiss German dialect	1	0.4		
EN + Standard German	2	0.9		
EN + Latin	1	0.4		
French + Spanish	1	0.4		
EN + French	1	0.4	1	0.4
EN + Asian language	1	0.4		
Gaelic			1	0.4
Total	227	99.8	247	100

Table 1: The languages contained in a status update

It is striking that the Swiss use English in 82 per cent of SUs, despite the fact that this is not the first language for the majority; two of the ten are bilingual (Swiss German, English),⁷ five have Swiss German as their first language but a high command of English; one is a native speaker of Swiss German with near native speaker competence in English and one is a native speaker of English with a high command of Swiss German (personal knowledge of the focus group members). This may reflect the relatively high level of English of many Swiss who go to university or complete higher education, coupled with the prestige English generally enjoys in Switzerland (Watts/Murray 2001), and the role of English as an

⁷ One of the two has English as her mother tongue, and learnt German as an L2 from a young age; the other was raised as a bilingual.

international *lingua franca*, which enables individuals with different linguistic repertoires to interact with one another (cf. Durham 2007 on English *lingua franca* use on a Swiss mailing list and Herring 2011: 342, who comments on “the use of English as a *lingua franca*, second language, or marker of (elite) social identities” as being “the ‘elephant in the room’”, which studies on CMC rarely discuss).

In contrast to our findings, Lee reports that the SUs of 20 bilingual English-Cantonese Facebookers showed that only 60 per cent wrote SUs predominantly in English. After “Facebook changed the prompt to ‘What’s on your mind’”, even “more Chinese and mixed-code messages were identified” (2011: 118-19). Lee (2011: 119) hypothesises that this might be due to the medium being perceived as more multilingual in the period after the prompt changed.⁸ Our Swiss focus group, eight of which do not have English as their first language, seems to pursue the ideology of English as a *lingua franca* in the SUs, while showing more language diversity in the RSUs, as we will show below.

As a second step, we analysed what languages appear in the reactions to status updates (Table 2). Since there are select instances in which the responses were solely performed through emoticons, we have included this category, but will not discuss it further here. As Table 2 demonstrates, there are striking differences between the two focus groups in terms of the variety and mix of languages. The UK-focus group predominantly answers in English (96.8%), so we are dealing with a group that does not draw on other languages for identity construction. There are only minor exceptions involving five instances of RSUs performed in both English and French and one in French alone. In the case of FG-S, we find a

⁸ As Lenihan 2011: 57 found in her study of the translation application of the Facebook *interface*, the base language of the platform interface of Facebook is still English, despite its ideological dedication to multilingualism.

wide range of languages. The RSUs are authored in English (alone or in combination with other language varieties), French, Standard German (alone or in combination with other language varieties), and Swiss German. The display of knowledge of a variety of different languages thus emerges as part of the set of acts of positioning that the Swiss focus group draws on regularly.

Language	RSUs FG-S (n=363)	%	RSUs FG-UK (n=432)	%
Emoticons only	7	1.9	8	1.9
English (EN)	190	52.3	418	96.8
EN + Afrikaans	2	0.6		
EN + French	1	0.3	5	1.2
EN + Standard German (G)	20	5.5		
EN + Italian	1	0.3		
EN + Spanish	1	0.3		
EN + Swiss German (SG)	9	2.5		
EN + SG + G	2	0.6		
French			1	0.2
Standard German (G)	75	20.7		
G + Bavarian	1	0.3		
G + French	1	0.3		
G + SG + Italian	1	0.3		
G + SG dialect	8	2.2		
Swiss German	44	12.1		
Total	363	100	432	100

Table 2: The languages used in RSUs (ordered alphabetically, N=795)

This language variation does not only stand out when we compare the two focus groups, but also when we compare the SUs and RSUs. Whereas 81.9% of all SUs in FG-S were in English, the figure

for English-only RSUs has dropped to 52.3%. Paralleling this decrease in English-only entries, we find an increase in the use of other languages and varieties. English is combined with Afrikaans, French, Italian, Standard Spanish, Swiss German and Standard German in a total of 10.1% of the RSUs; German-only RSUs account for 20.7% of the total, and combinations of Standard German with other varieties for 3.1%; and 12.1% of all RSUs are Swiss German only. If we think back to the percentages of Standard German SUs (15%) and Swiss German SUs (0.4%), it is evident that both have gained ground.

The close analysis of both the SUs and the RSUs provides insight into the display of multilingualism, and shows that whereas SUs tend to be monolingual, RSUs are often multilingual. It also shows that we frequently find code-switching within the RSUs (cf. the combination of languages in Table 2 above). However, code-switching not only occurs within the RSU, but also between the SU and the RSU. In analysing code-switching we thus coded for a) instances in which the SU is written in one language and the RSU in another, and b) instances in which the language changes within the RSU turn itself. In the case of the second option, we are by default also dealing with cases where there is a code-switch between the SU and the RSU. Code-switching was not explored in the SUs because of the tendency for them to be English-only. Results are presented in Table 3.

While Table 2 merely shows the presence of different languages in the 795 RSUs, Table 3 lists the 124 cases (16%) in which code-switching occurs (n=118, FG-S and n=6, FG-UK) between SUs and RSUs, or within RSUs. This means that in 84% of all RSUs there is in fact a match of the language in the SU with the language used in the RSU. Thus, overall code-switching is not as prominent a practice in these two related Facebook activities as one might expect from previous research (Androutsopoulos 2013). At the same time,

there is evidently no necessary connection between high frequency and degree of importance, and thus no reason for precluding analysis of these different types of code-switching and reflecting upon links to relational work and identity construction.

	FG-S	%	FG-UK	%
SU in one L – RSU entirely in another L in first position	24	20.3		
SU in one L – RSU entirely in another L in following position	47	39.8	1	16.7
L change within the RSU turn	47	39.8	5	83.3
Presence overall	118	99.9	6	100

Table 3: The presence of code-switching between SUs and RSUs and within RSUs (N=124)

In Table 3 we see that 71 RSUs (60.1% of the 118 in FG-S) are written entirely in a different language than the SU that triggered the comments in FG-S (we will not consider FG-UK here as the numbers are so small). 24 of these occur directly after the SU (i.e. in first position in a sequence of RSUs), while 47 appear in a later position and could thus be influenced by the language choice in the RSUs that precede them rather than by the language in the SU. Furthermore, 47 RSUs (39.8%) in first or subsequent position contain code-switching within the RSU text. Example (4) shows an SU authored in Standard German, followed by one RSU entirely in Swiss German and one in a mixture of Standard German and Swiss German.

- (4) SU: G Stefanie “und Nietzsche weinte..” ..
 RSU1: SG wägedäm mueschdu nid truurig si
 wägedämwägedäm rädäbäng... [posted by
 Adrian]

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- RSU2: G/SG sag das im Nietzsche.., oder em Herr Dr. Breuer?
 .. oder dr Anna O. oderoderoder em Freud?..
 [posted by Stefanie]
- SU: G ‘Stefanie “and Nietzsche wept”’
- RSU1: SG ‘you don’t have to be sad because of that because of
 that <nonce word>’ [posted by Adrian]
- RSU2: G/SG ‘tell this to Nietzsche.., or Dr. Breuer? ... or Anna O.
 or or or or Freud? ..’ [posted by Stefanie]

In the SU in (4), Stefanie uses the conjunction *and* to create an association between herself and the book *And Nietzsche Wept* (written by the American author and professor of psychiatry Yalom, in 1994). The Swiss-German reaction to the status update in RSU1 depicts part of a Swiss-German song (titled *O Susanna*). Since the song is about being sad (as a result of a break-up), it plays on the grief mentioned in the book title referred to by Stefanie in the SU. If we think back to the functions of code-switching mentioned above, we can argue that the code-switching in this example can be linked to the performance of a culturally-specific genre; here a Swiss-German song. We can further claim that in drawing on his cultural knowledge, the author of the RSU positions himself as having a Swiss-German identity. In RSU2, Stefanie responds in German and refers to the characters in the book. Her use of articles (*im, em, dr*) and the repetition of *oderoderoder* – a typical Swiss terminator of sentences in spoken interaction – give the RSU a Swiss German non-standard flavour. Stefanie thus accommodates to Adrian’s language choice and thereby demonstrates alignment.

A closer look at the RSUs that contain code-switching *within* the RSU shows that in FG-S 39% of the code-switches are of this kind (n=47), and in FG-UK, 83.3% (n=5). For the UK focus group, all five instances are code-switches between English and French (see (7) below for an example). For the Swiss focus group, there is greater variation. To recapitulate from Table 2 above, the central code-

switches are as follows. English is combined with other varieties in 76% of the instances. The most frequently occurring combinations are with Standard German (43%) and Swiss German (19%). English, Swiss German and Standard German account for an additional 4%, as does English and Afrikaans; English and French, English and Italian, and English and Spanish account for a further 2% in each instance. Combinations of Standard German with other varieties make up the remaining 23%. The most frequently occurring code-switch is between Standard German and Swiss German (17%). There are also instances of code-switching between Standard German, Swiss German and Italian (2%), Standard German and Bavarian (a German dialect) (2%) and Standard German and French (2%). While highlighting the prominence of English on the Facebook walls of both of our focus groups, these results draw attention to the increase in importance of Standard German and Swiss German in the RSUs of FG-S – a point we will return to shortly.

Direction of switch in FG-S	n=	%
SU English – RSU entirely in Standard German	33	46
SU English – RSU entirely in Swiss German dialect	26	37
SU English – RSU entirely in Spanish	1	1
SU Standard German – RSU entirely in English	2	3
SU Standard German – RSU entirely in SG dialect	9	13
Total	71	100

Table 4: SU written in one language – RSU entirely written in another (n=71)

A closer look at the 71 code-switches *between* SUs and RSUs in Table 4 also shows that both Standard German and Swiss German

gain in importance.⁹ This means that some English status updates prompt Standard German or Swiss German responses. Methodologically, this finding shows the importance of going beyond an analysis of “single turns or posts and examin[ing] the sequential organisation of codeswitching within threads of dialogically related posts or messages” (Androutsopoulos 2013: 683). As stated above, it also warrants conceptualising code-switching as co-constructed by different parties in interaction.

As Table 4 highlights, the direction of the switch when comparing SUs and RSUs is mainly from English to Standard German (46%) and Swiss German (37%). What we clearly see is that Swiss German has gained ground in the RSUs, which regularly developed into small conversations.¹⁰ The prominence of English in the SUs suggests that posters may be addressing a readership with mixed language background, i.e. it is likely that some of their Facebook friends have little Standard German and/or Swiss German competence. They may even be attempting to reach the entire public and thus opt to use English as a *lingua franca*. However, once addressivity is less broad, they switch to the variety they usually use when interacting with one another. In many cases the prime language of these relationships “anchored” in offline settings is Standard German (predominantly in written

⁹ Here we no longer distinguish between the first and subsequent RSUs. What is of primary interest are linguistic differences between the two main activity types: SUs and RSUs.

¹⁰ Earlier research on multilingualism and code-switching has also pointed to the use of both Swiss German and Standard German in written CMC. In his study of Swiss-German Internet Relay Chat (IRC), Siebenhaar 2006 discusses the role played by these varieties and compares the frequency of use in regional (n=6) versus supra-regional (n=7) Swiss chats. His analysis shows that Standard German is more prominent in the supra-regional chats in which adults participate, while Swiss German gains in importance in the regional chats preferred by teenagers. The tendency to use a *lingua franca*, like German in the case of Siebenhaar’s 2006 data, in contexts in which one is addressing a broader audience, is corroborated by our data for the Swiss focus group, which uses English as a *lingua franca* for this purpose.

communication) or Swiss German (predominantly in oral communication) (cf. Zhao/Grasmuck/Martin 2008 for a discussion of anchored relationships and identity construction; cf. also Bolander/Locher 2010; Bolander/Locher in press). An illustration of this can be seen in Example (1) presented at the beginning of the paper, where two friends discuss the possibility of meeting up at the weekend. As the example shows, while the SU is in English, the ensuing dialogue between Peter and Manuel is in Swiss German and Standard German. In drawing on a combination of English (as a lingua franca and as the language of the initial 'turn') and Standard German or Swiss German (as the common code), an RSU author directs their contribution at a more specific group of addressees. Evidently, they are only likely to switch codes in the RSU if their target audience has access to the codes in question. In opting to author an RSU in a code which is accessible to their target audience, the RSU writer simultaneously creates an in-group and an out-group. The former is made up of those who are explicitly identified as target recipients, for example, through naming, or quoting (cf. Bolander 2012 and 2013 for a discussion of ways of creating responsiveness in the genre of personal/diary blogs), or implicitly become potential recipients, by virtue of their command of the varieties in question. The out-group consists of those who do not have access to the varieties in question and can thus no longer follow and become actively involved in the discussion which ensues. That this practice of using the lingua franca in the SU and switching to in-group languages in the RSUs is common was confirmed in an informal discussion with students of a course on computer-mediated communication in 2008, who were asked whether and why they switched languages in RSUs. What we seldom find (as indicated in Table 4) are English responses to Standard German or Swiss-German SUs. Presumably, in such contexts RSU authors choose not to respond with a language (English) that would index a move away from the

language or variety they regularly communicate in (Swiss German or Standard German).

If we reflect upon this finding in light of the functions of code-switching mentioned above, we can argue that such code-switching serves to index closeness between interlocutors. To this we can add that these switches evidence friendship identity claims. We also see this in Example (5) where the SU triggered one RSU.

- (5) SU: E Marina is coughing like hell.
 RSU: I/G/SG oh poverina! Ich bin auch so was von
 verpfnüselt. hass es. nase schon ganz rot vom
 schütze. bist am mi nachmittag in zb? gute
 besserung principessa! [posted by Luisa]
 *'ahh poor little thing. I also have such a terrible cold.
 hate it. my nose is already totally red from blowing it.
 will you be at the university library on Wednesday
 afternoon? get well princess!'*

Whereas Marina's SU is in English (addressed to her Facebook friends as a whole and thus to an unspecified group of addressees), Luisa, who is also a close friend offline, self-selects and responds with a creative RSU in Standard German that contains Swiss German (*verpfnüselt*, *sch[n]ütze*) and Italian (*poverina*, *principessa*) words. This RSU is specifically addressed to Marina, rather than to the readership at large (although it is witnessed by this very readership), and creates common ground between the two friends since both have a cold. Furthermore, the RSU is written in the language that the two use to communicate offline (mainly Swiss-German in spoken interaction and Standard German in written interaction), a factor which is also made manifest by the content. Next to displaying multilingual language skills, the RSU thus also serves to make a public friendship claim.

A further example of alignment is presented in (6), an example from the UK focus group.

- (6) SU: E Gemma will be in Paris with Mrs [NAME] this time tomorrow! Happy Honeymoon!
- RSU1: E/F urgh as if. you sicken me Gemma I will be in a presentation sweating and shaking haha have a tres belle time! X [posted by Caroline]
- ...
- RSU4: F bonjour bon voyage [posted by Anna]

The SU is written in English and triggers seven RSUs. In RSU1 “have a *tres belle* time” contains an alignment to the travel destination Paris, that Gemma mentions for her honeymoon (this is a case of code-switching within an RSU). RSU2-3 and 5-7 are written in English. In RSU4, however, the author writes entirely in French to align with Gemma. The words *bonjour* and *bon voyage* are generally known French words so that we can speak of an instance of language evocation (cf. Bleichenbacher 2007). French is also stereotypically considered the language of love, so the author of the RSU may additionally be performing supportive relational work with regard to Gemma’s marriage. As our previous research showed, we commonly find supportive relational work in reactions to status updates; the current research of our data makes manifest that such supportive relational work or acts of alignment is one of the most prominent functions of code-switching.

Finally, it is worth drawing attention to two further functions of code-switching in our Facebook data, which were also mentioned by Androutsopoulos (2013: 681): “switching for formulaic discourse purposes” (7) and switching to index humour (8).

- (7) SU: E Marina had a wonderful day.
- RSU: G/SG/E **war wirklich ein toller tag. hoffe kommst voran mit schreiben!! bis gli, kiss** [posted by Sandra]
- ‘[It] really was a great day. hope you are progressing well with writing!! until soon, kiss’

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(8) SU: E Jan macht heut nachmittag eine kinderkrrippe
auf.via Twitter

[two people jokingly offer to bring their kids along]

RSU6: kein problem für supernanno (oder was ist die
männliche form einer nanny?) [posted by Jan]

SU: G ‘This afternoon Jan is opening a crèche. via Twitter’

[two people jokingly offer to bring their kids along]

RSU6: ‘no problem for supernanno (or what is the male form
of a nanny?)’ [posted by Jan]

In (7), the SU is in English, yet the reaction is in Standard German (bold), Swiss German (underlined) and English (italics). The presence of the code-switching in the closings at the end of the RSU indicates that it is used for formulaic discourse purposes. In (8), there is code-switching in the RSU, as the author uses the English term *nanny* in a response which is otherwise written in Standard German. In addition, he creates the form *supernanno*, which could be argued to be the Italian male derivative of the word *nanny*. In showing his knowledge of the TV show *Supernanny* he plays with the possible masculine and feminine forms of the word *nanny*, while simultaneously referencing the cultural stereotype that nannies tend to be female. In producing this humorous RSU, Jan constructs his identity as that of a humorous and multilingual individual. As these examples indicate, the analysis of Facebook SUs and RSUs provide fruitful grounds for the study of code-switching and for reflecting upon links between code-switching and identity construction.

5. Conclusion and outlook

In our analysis of code-switching presented in this paper, we were interested firstly in how code-switching is displayed in the SUs and RSUs, and secondly in where we can find links to relational work and identity construction. To address these two issues, we analysed 474 SUs and 795 RSUs. The data was selected from two focus groups (FG-S and FG-UK), each made up of ten participants.

Overall English was prominent in the SUs and RSUs authored by both FG-S and FG-UK participants, a finding which is striking for the FG-S group, since the majority of them do not have English as a first language. At the same time, the Swiss focus group also makes use of a variety of other languages when authoring SUs and particularly RSUs. In using a range of languages, the FG-S participants position themselves as multilingual individuals who have an assortment of linguistic resources they can draw on.

In addition to our discussion of multilingualism, we focused on code-switching. It was analysed both between SUs and RSUs, and within RSUs. Through our analysis we underlined associations between activity type (SU or RSU) and audience. Whereas SUs are addressed to a more public group (of one's Facebook friends) and hence authored in English as a *lingua franca*, RSUs are more often directed at a specific addressee or group of addressees and written in the first languages of these individuals. In singling out an intended audience, the RSU author adjusts their code accordingly (code-switch between SU and RSU); they may also thereby draw on other languages and switch within the RSU. In doing so, they construct an in-group and an out-group. This finding draws attention to a) the importance of going beyond an analysis of only single turns to emergent interactions between two or more parties, and, related to this, b) the need to conceptualise code-switching as a form of joint action, which is co-constructed, a finding which is

compatible with our understanding of identity construction as intersubjectively emergent.

In analysing code-switching both within and between SUs and RSUs we also highlighted a series of functions: the use of code-switching for the enactment of culturally-specific genres; to index a particular addressee and connected with this one's alignment towards them; for formulaic discourse purposes; and to mark that the SU or RSU is humorous. This shows that the functions identified by Androutsopoulos (2013) in connection with the research conducted on code-switching in CMC thus far can also be applied to the social network site Facebook. In addition, we underlined ties to identity construction and relational work. We thereby pointed to the performance of cultural identities, the positioning of friends and the construction of a humorous identity, and to the supportive relational work enacted through alignment. The display of multilingual language competence can thus be argued to be multifunctional with respect to identity construction and can be added to the acts of positioning we identified in previous work (Bolander/Locher, in press).

While our paper clearly highlights that the functions of code-switching outlined for other modes of CMD are indeed applicable to Facebook and that there are links between code-switching and identity work and relational work, the analysis of these functions and ties is still preliminary. More systematic work on this subject matter needs to be done. In light of the clear importance of the analysis of emergent "polylogues" (Marcoccia 2004) in connection with a view of code-switching as co-constructed, more attention needs to be paid to the interactions in responses to status updates, where we not only find RSUs respond to SUs but also to other RSUs. A series of smaller case studies on particular interactions would likely shed more light on the intricacies of code-switching in Facebook and its various functions.

Opening the scope again and moving beyond our text-based analysis of code-switching in the SUs and RSUs and the link to positioning, we should stress the multimodal nature of Facebook once more. In performing activities interlocutors do not solely rely on text (cf. Bolander/Locher 2010). The multimodality of Facebook and other computer-mediated settings raises new questions for researchers and poses new challenges. While scholars are increasingly pointing to the importance of going beyond text-based analysis to an incorporation of other modes, as yet there is a paucity of guidelines and literature which problematises the topic of multimodality. In tackling the topics of multilingualism and code-switching, and potential ties to relational work and identity construction, we opted to focus on text. While this was warranted by the fact that the SUs and RSUs are predominantly text-based, our study will be enriched once we take the other activity types, such as accepting gifts, posting of pictures and videos, creating groups, etc., into account as well.

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Speak Your Mind, but Watch Your Mouth: Complaints in CouchSurfing References

1. Introduction

CouchSurfing (CS) is a hospitality network that allows people to connect during their travels, socialise with locals and, most importantly, stay at other members' houses for free. Letting strangers into your home presents high stakes in the offline component of this community and engenders the need for a reliable trust-building mechanism. Part of this mechanism consists of references, where members detail their CS experience and broadly label it as positive, neutral or negative. Naturally, neutral and negative references are rich in accounts of grievances, i.e. complaints.

Complaints are notoriously difficult to elicit, and much research on the topic is based on data from questionnaires, discourse completion tests or role plays (Olshtain/Weinbach 1993; Trosborg 1995; Kraft/Geluykens 2002; Chen et al. 2011). Nevertheless, the Internet as a source of natural language data on complaints has been tapped only in few studies. Among the characteristic features that distinguish online complaints from their offline counterparts are the abundance of explicit complaining strategies with little or no mitigation (Meinl 2010 on eBay references) and the blurring of the

border between direct and indirect complaints (Vasquez 2011 on TripAdvisor reviews). Complaints on CS, however, differ from these patterns. CS members' credibility is based on their reputation and their network capital, which is potentially affected by every contribution to the website. Every negative reference is therefore a weighty face-threatening act (FTA) that may damage the addressee (by criticising their competence as a couchsurfer) as well as the complainant (by presenting them as a yammerer and an undesirable guest with a high risk factor for negative references). Thus, the reference writers must balance the obligation to write honest references (a tool to ensure the community's safety) against the desire to protect face.

This paper analyses complaint performance in the CS setting and investigates pragmatic strategies that the authors use to strike that balance. We specifically focus on objectification as a means to substantiate a complaint, and examine how authors highlight and manage objectivity. CS profiles provide rich demographic information, while the power of CS to cross linguistic borders enables a look into the pragmatic competence of non-native speakers of English.

2. CouchSurfing

CouchSurfing is a location-based social network that was founded in 2003 and strived to offer people a path to cheap and authentic travel. Bypassing traditional social norms, the founders agreed that it is acceptable to ask a complete stranger for accommodation based on no more shared background than CS membership. Surprisingly, the website thrived and quickly gathered popularity, reaching 4,6 million members worldwide in 2012.

In contrast to popular social networking services (SNS) which demonstrate a strong offline-to-online trend (e.g. Ellison et al. 2007 for Facebook), CS connections have primarily online-to-offline directionality. Similarly to a typical SNS, a member creates a personal profile which may include details on age, gender, geographical location, living situation, life philosophy etc. Each member has access to two CS roles: host or 'surfer' (i.e. guest). By setting the profile indicator to 'Has couch', the member announces to travellers in his proximity that he is potentially available as a host and invites personal messages for arranging the details of the stay. Alternatively, a member can search CS for couches available at his potential destination and choose from the list of results the hosts whom he will contact.

The Mission page of the CS website highlights the communicative affordance of CS as its main purpose: "Our online and mobile platforms connect people to one another, affordably, safely and easily" (Couchsurfing 2011). CS strives to facilitate networking among strangers. The resulting network can be used to repeatedly secure free accommodation and authentic cultural experiences during travel. Construing networks as a form of social capital (Burt 2000; Wong/Salaff 1998), it is the number and quality of documented connections with other members that comprises the network capital of a couchsurfer. The quality of ties is especially important since members trade such a personal commodity as accommodation at one's own home. In other words, the network capital of a member resides primarily in trust (Feng et al. 2004; Rosen et al. 2011): higher evidenced trustworthiness raises the probability of receiving a positive answer to a couch request.

CS offers multiple mechanisms for building initial trust among members. Apart from creating a comprehensive profile, a member has the possibility to verify his address by credit card, to confirm his identity by showing a photo ID to another CS member, or to be

vouched for by a senior member. All this information features prominently in the profile. The ultimate trust-gaining channel on CS, however, is the peer referencing system (Pultar/Raubal 2009). By giving and receiving positive references one progressively accumulates network capital. The process is recursive in that a face-to-face meeting is a prerequisite to a new reference, and another member is more likely to accept a surfing request or ask to be hosted if the profile in question has many positive references.

Interpersonal trust in online communities dovetails with face. The positive self-image that an interactant tries to claim for himself (Brown/Levinson 1987) in the context of CS comprises a trustworthy, reasonable person who makes a pleasant host and surfer and is unlikely to incur loss of network capital to other members. It is therefore not surprising that a weighty FTA such as complaint exhibits different patterns in CS references than in other CMC environments. Complaints on online-based networks oriented towards exchange of information (TripAdvisor) or goods (eBay) are performed by means of explicit strategies without mitigation since both the complainant and complaineé are relatively anonymous and there is little need to save face (Vasquez 2011). In turn, on CS the author of a negative reference makes himself vulnerable by invoking an image of a trigger-happy complainant who is a liability to future hosts and guests. Such an image is to be avoided at all costs; at the same time, the CS guidelines as well as sense of responsibility for fellow couchsurfers compel the member to document a negative experience. This clash commits CS members to a specific tactic of FTA performance which aims at saving the complainant's positive face with no redress for the addressee's positive or negative face. The strategies used to perform such complaints are discussed in the following section.

3. Performing a legitimate complaint: CS perspective

The communicative act of complaining involves passing moral judgement about a certain action by the complaineer (Trosborg 1995). The moral judgement, which states the reprehensibility of the complaineer's conduct and/or negatively evaluates the complaineer as a person, places complaints into the sphere of social actions. Such actions are by definition accountable phenomena which are discursively constructed in reports about the complainable and are performed within a certain subjective stance (Drew 1998). While some strategies of complaint performance may position the complainant as a yammerer or paranoiac, others serve to substantiate the account (Edwards 2005).

The objectification strategies aim to validate the transgression as a complainable matter in the eyes of a third party, and therefore are typically used in *third-party* or *indirect* complaints. The direct/indirect complaint dichotomy describes two distinct intended audiences: in case of direct complaints, the complaineer himself; and in case of indirect complaints, a third party who is neither held responsible nor capable of remedying the perceived offence (Boxer 1993). Vasquez (2011), however, notes that in online contexts, the strict binary distinction between direct and indirect complaints might be inappropriate, as CMC complaints have a potential to be simultaneously direct and indirect. This is certainly true for CS references. While they are posted on the profile page of the complaineer and immediately come to his attention, the main function of references is to provide information to other CS members. Thus, the intended audience also includes prospective hosts or guests of the complaineer.

As we have hypothesised in the previous section, complainants in CS references focus on maintaining their positive face in order to avoid loss, and continue accumulation, of trust. This can be achieved by constructing descriptions of the complainable as factual and by discounting any subjective reasons for complaining. In the remainder of this paper, we will be looking at complaint objectification strategies in negative and neutral CS references, i.e. various ways of ‘legitimising the complaint’ (Pomerantz 1986). 56 neutral and negative references were collected in 2011. After coding the references independently, both authors worked together to achieve complete interrater agreement. Demographic information on the reference authors can be found in Table 1.

Age		Gender		Native language		English proficiency	
20-30	23	male	24	English	24	expert	11
>30	18	female	21	German	10	intermediate	5
not indicated	7	joint	3	French	4	beginner	2
				Arabic, Hindi, Japanese, Italian, Mongolian, Norwegian, Spanish, Swedish	x 1	not indicated	6
				not indicated	2		
Total: 48 profiles ¹							

Table 1. Profile information

¹ Hereafter, profile information is coded in each example. E.g. [F28GerInt] – a female, 28 year old, German native speaker, intermediate level of English.

In the next sections we will discuss the specific ways in which CS members apply and modify objectification strategies to render their negative references as believable accounts of true events.

3.1. Empiricist discourse

One way of endorsing the complainant's positive face and lending objectivity to the complaint discourse is the construction of 'out-there-ness'. This tactic involves presenting the report as independent of the author and drawing the emphasis away from the identity of the complainant to put it on the complainable (Potter 1996: 152).

Linguistically, the desired attributes of impartiality and disinterestedness are embodied by the empiricist repertoire (Gilbert/Mulkay 1984). While preferring passive voice in the account of own actions or feelings, the producers of discourse use active verbs for actors in the reported situation (in our context, the complainee). In order to pointedly disengage from the construction of blame, the complainant may refrain from explicitly passing moral judgement. Instead, he limits the discursive action to the statement of events and therefore leaves the legitimacy judgement to the recipient. Covert author involvement in such cases resides in the version of events presented to the recipient. All descriptions are constructions of events, and although the author does not invoke nonexistent facts, he selects one of the relevant alternatives which is in line with his agenda (Edwards/Potter 2005). In example (1), for instance, the author does not explicitly complain about the behaviour of the opposite party:

- (1) [F68Eng] I had arranged to surf with Inga but arrived very late at night, so stayed in a hotel the first night. The next morning I had a hotel clerk call and get directions to give to the taxi driver. When we arrived, there was no one there, and the hut was locked. She did

not answer her phone when I tried to call again. However a man came and opened the hut to show the inside. There was snow on the ground, so I could not stay waiting. I had to take the taxi back to town and then stayed somewhere else. It was very expensive to take a taxi so far both ways.²

Despite her first-hand experience which must have been rather traumatic – arriving to a foreign country, travelling far outside the city to meet her host, only to find the accommodations locked – the complainant refrains from evaluative judgement. Instead, she recounts bare facts in order of their occurrence, almost as if she were not present at the scene at all. However, the facts are clearly at odds with an average person's understanding of hospitality. The story thus unambiguously invites the recipient to the reaction that corresponds with the author's implicit assessment.

Schrader-Kniffki (this volume) points out that polyphonic discourse is an evidentiality device that contributes to the construction of the identity of an expert in the struggle over who has the "right knowledge". The inclusion of direct quotations is a tool that is also used in CS references to lend veracity to the account, despite the fact that the accuracy of a verbatim quote can hardly be proven.

- (2) [M23Eng] I hosted Andy after he posted in the Colorado group that he "desperately needed cool people to hangout with". [...] Yet in one night Andy insulted my friends and my roommate and spent two hours crying at a party that he coerced me into bringing him to.

Fragment (2) opens a negative reference which proceeds with the statement of weighty complainables: the complainees "insulted (*author's*) friends" and "coerced" the host into something. In the beginning, the author models his discursive footing on that of a

² All examples either belong to public accounts or are quoted with permission of respective CS members. All names of persons and places have been changed to preserve anonymity.

news presenter, projecting himself as an animator merely reporting words and actions of others (Goffman 1981). This strategy works toward establishing the complainant's truthfulness from the start and indirectly contributes to the positive image of an objective discourse participant.

3.2. Corroboration

Another tactic of objectifying the complaint involves constructing consensus by presenting corroborating evidence and accounts by independent witnesses (Edwards/Potter 1992; Wooffitt 1992; Potter 1996). Consensus and corroboration can be achieved in two ways: by drawing on the resources external to the current account, and by including witnesses into the report.

The first type of corroboration is a more reliable way of rendering report into a fact and occurs, for instance, in court. The author may refer to an independently produced testimony that describes similar situations or behaviour.

In CS, this tactic of *joint production* is realised by indexing existing references that cite the same complainable. Excerpts (3) and (4) both situate themselves within the larger context of CS references:

- (3) [F36Eng] I feel that you did not respect my boundaries on a number of occasions, that you are too focused on romance, you make disrespectful jokes about women, and you don't stop when a woman says stop. Even though you have many positive references, I counted 7 people on HC³ and CS who felt single women should be warned.
- (4) [M102Eng] I've 200 poz and only 1 neg refs-read his ref and decide if u want this prsn in ur house. [...] Over 1 mth later, w/o ever msging me directly to this day, Alec left me one of the most MEAN-

³ Hospitality Club

spirited references i've read on CS, and he keeps changing it months l8r to keep this war going thats in his own head. I and the others who attended were shocked by his ref - he seems to only surf and not host; several ppl have not left feedback for him.

The author of fragment (3) refers quite explicitly to the transgression committed by the complaine: the complainable resides in the unwanted sexual advances of her male host. Such impropriety may cause serious damage to the complaine's capital of trust. The rebound from a negative reference of such consequence may blemish the author's reputation as well. To protect her positive face, the complainant corroborates her report by discursively incorporating other references into the account of the complainable. This joint production of complaint implies that the transgression occurs regularly and emphasises the possibility of something similar happening to the next female surfer.

In example (4), the negative reference itself constitutes the complainable. In addition to joint production, fragment (4) employs the second way of manufacturing consensus: building witnesses' accounts into the report. The reference to "I and the others" indicates that not only the complainant was shocked by the couchsurfer's behaviour, his friends were as well. Whereas one person's discomfort might be construed as merely ill-matched personalities or even the fault of the complainant, claiming that other people also had the same impression substantiates the complainable.

3.3. Complaint stories

A prominent place in establishing one's entitlement as a witness is held by the package of linguistic strategies that are used to construct a complaint story (Holt 2000). By borrowing from the toolbox of literary authors, a complainant endows his report with vivid realistic details that confirm its factuality. The effect can be

reached by various linguistic means. Apart from such traditional devices as narrative present, verb initial positioning, and affective semantic loading (Günthner 2000), the authors frequently resort to scrupulous detailing. The concept of defensive detailing (Drew 1998) applies to the instances of *graphic narrative description* of events that constitute the complainable or provide a background to it. Filling the chronologically arranged description of a situation with specific references to people, places or times enables the author to stage it as a realistic ‘little show’ (Goffman 1974):

- (5) [F53NorInt] My two grown up children, husband and I had arranged to couchsurf with Inga in January 2007. [...] We brought gifts and sweets for her and the children, went back to town to buy food and wine and to cook us all a meal. Still we got the impression that Inga was unsatisfied and expected to earn some money from our stay, which I felt is not in the spirit of CS. We are by no means in need of a high degree of comfort, but it was the about zero degrees and we were not equipped for sleeping in a cold, none isolated hut with a stove we had to feed all night. When we told Inga that we had decided to stay in a hostel in town instead, she did not want to eat with us, speak or say goodbye.

The complainable – the poor living conditions in the hut and the host’s mercenary intentions – could have been presented in a concise and plain reference. Instead, the complainant constructs a traditional narrative by first introducing the setting and the main actors in Past Perfect tense, then describing facts and actions in Simple Past in a chronological order and embellishing the description with colourful minutiae such as “a cold, none isolated hut with a stove we had to feed all night” or “she did not want to eat with us, speak or say goodbye”. The scenic reconstruction of the events is complete with the use of *verba sentiendi* (i.e. “we got the impression that”, “I felt”), which give the reader a glimpse into the complainant’s mind.

On the other hand, defensive detailing is a double-edged sword. Provided the opportunity to rebut the complaint, the complainee may answer with a competing account of events that recasts the original complainant as a yammerer or a liar (cf. Edwards 1999: 273-275). The competing account is substantiated through *undermining detailing* which focuses on different minutiae of the complainable. The malleability of real life situations is illustrated in the following example:

- (6) [F24Eng] Perhaps it was a conflict of interest, but Edward left my roommate and I very unsettled. He was extremely upset and cried on our couch for the majority of the time we spent with him.
- (7) [M23Eng] I must say also, her roommate and I got along nicely, and spent mutual time crying on each others shoulders, contrary I think to my reference.

The author of fragment (6) complains about the emotional disposition of her CS guest. The veracity of the report is achieved through witness corroboration (“my roommate and I”) and supportive graphic detailing (“He... cried on our couch for the majority of the time”). Edward undermines her report by contesting the witness’s account (“her roommate and I got along nicely”). In his version of the events, the complainee actually has a good time with him (“spent mutual time crying on each others shoulders”). The interplay of the initial graphic narrative description and the undermining detailing illustrates the flexibility in the production of alternative versions of the same event and highlights the ‘reconstructive’ nature of complaint stories (Bergmann/Luckmann 1995).

3.4. Script formulations

The notion of scriptedness has been borrowed by discursive psychologists from cognitive linguistics to explain how participants in discourse impose their perceived routines, pre-organisations and

constraints on reality and therefore construe it in different ways (Edwards 1994; Drew/Heritage 1998). The central tenet of this approach is that reality always underdetermines the reports, and the author performs active social work when framing the events in his account as having a certain status.

In complaint stories, authors employ script formulations to achieve one of two effects. Firstly, the complainees' deplorable actions are presented as one instance of dangerous or antisocial behaviour typical for this person and thus function as a warning for the recipient. It allows the author to defend his positive face by presenting himself as a tolerant person who only complains about repeated offences, as opposed to an odd slip-up. 'The typicality script' may be invoked by normalising adverbials such as 'always', 'all the time', 'constantly', the use of present tenses, or the habitual 'would'. Legitimising powers of the typicality script become clear in negative reference (8), where the situation is rendered complainable only by virtue of belonging to the script 'No-show':

- (8) [M37GerBeg] Bill contacted me about one month before he wanted to stay at my home. Directly I offered accommodation, but he did not confirm his stay. Three days before the fixed date I canceled my tender. All to often I am waiting for nothing...

Secondly, the author may explicitly or implicitly refer to a script of normality *in the relevant context* to justify his perception of the event as complainable. This usage requires a shared cognitive background between the complainant and the audience and appeals to the feeling of in-group solidarity. Such scripts are usually invoked by explicitly quoting a fragment of the script ('a rule') and juxtaposing it with the complainees' actions.

Given that CS members define themselves as a community, it is unsurprising that a set of behavioural norms has developed spontaneously and has been fixed in multiple guidelines and tips avail-

able on the website. These rules of CS are often implicitly present in references and can be loosely formulated as follows:

1. Members are not to be charged for surfing or hosting.
2. Surfers try to contribute in non-monetary ways (e.g. washing dishes).
3. CS is not a dating website.
4. CS is about making friends and engaging with new cultures, not impersonal free accommodation ('spirit of CS' vs. 'freeloading').
5. Surfing and hosting must be arranged beforehand via CS messages.
6. Couch requests have to be answered, even if the answer is negative.
7. It is member's duty to leave honest references.

These rules amount to a CS script which is assumed to be shared by the community. Naturally, deviations from it are undesirable and lessen one's network capital. The violations of CS script serve as the basis for complaint in example (9):

- (9) [F53NorInt] Still we got the impression that Inga was unsatisfied and expected to earn some money from our stay, which I felt is not in the spirit of CS.

Fragment (9), which is the reproduction of reference (5) above, refers to the no-payment rule. The author marks the complainable as violating the CS script ("spirit of CS" or "couchsurfing ideals") and shows that she is aware of the existence and importance of the script. Invoking the script boosts the account by presenting the complainable action as not only diverging from the complainant's personal ideas of propriety, but also, more importantly, from the rules of the whole community.

3.5. Objectifying by mitigation

Creativity of language users is manifested in the ways they adapt established pragmatic strategies to suit their means. One stereotypical strategy involved in the performance of face-to-face complaints is mitigation. According to Trosborg (1995: 313), speakers mitigate their complaints in order to “avoid a direct confrontation with the complainees”, which is desirable in contexts where the addressee’s positive face must be appeased. However, in CS references the priority lies with the complainant’s positive face, following the tendency of internet environments towards self-oriented face work (cf. Schrader-Kniffki, this volume). An interesting consequence is that CS complainants employ mitigation as yet another objectification strategy.

Our data yielded two forms of mitigation that work as a supportive move for objectification. The first device is the juxtaposition of the complainable with a single positive element, typically introduced by the conjunction ‘but’. Coupling of an inherently face-threatening act such as disagreement, criticism or disapproval with positive politeness has been observed in offline oral and written discourse as well (cf. Thaler (this volume) for an overview of literature). But in contrast to peer reviews or refusal letters, in CS data the insertion of the positive element is geared towards self-presentation rather than reaffirming solidarity.

- (10)[J32FreExp] we were not comfortable there because we felt pressured to participate financially from the moment we arrived and we found her to have a moody character. But she is a good woman and we wish the best to her family.

By mentioning laudable actions or character traits of the complainees, the complainants demonstrate their objectivity and reject the identity of dispositional fault-finder. The authors of (10) show

their good will towards the host despite all the transgressions and project themselves as reasonable and objective.

Besides, reference writers may choose to provide a justification for the complaine. Fragment (11), for instance, mitigates the “hygienic issue” by conceding that it is difficult to be immaculate during a long backpacking trip.

(11)[F32GerExp] I dare say - there is a hygienic issue [...] I may judge him wrongly, as he is currently travelling

This tactic aims to construct an image of a tolerant person and lower the perceived risk to the network capital of future hosts or guests.

Table 2 provides a summary of the objectification strategies. As the discussion has shown, a significant amount of discursive effort in CS complaints is spent on depicting the seriousness of the offence. In contrast to face work in offline contexts, which involves redress to avoid threatening the addressee’s face, these preventive measures are oriented towards endorsing the author’s positive face and constructing an image of a reasonable, tolerant and honest couch-surfer.

1. Empiricist discourse	a. Impersonal account b. Reported talk
2. Corroboration	a. Joint production b. Report-internal witness corroboration
3. Complaint stories	a. Graphic narrative description b. Undermining detailing
4. Script formulations	a. Typicality script b. Context-specific scripts
5. Mitigation	a. But + positive b. Justifying complaine’s behaviour

Table 2. Objectifying strategies in complaints

4. Conclusion

In this paper we have been concerned with the ways in which language users navigate the treacherous terrain of negative references on a hospitality network. The emphasis on mutual trust in the successful operation of an online community makes complainants doubly careful in formulating their reports. On the one hand, the complainable needs to be legitimised as such, since reality always underdetermines the report of the complaint situation. On the other, the author must work against the image of a dispositional yammerer hosting whom may put other members' trust capital at risk.

It is doubtful whether an objective measure of a complaint success can be devised for CS. Six references in our data were answered by an apology from the perpetrator. The effect appears to be mostly idiosyncratic, as four of these were performed by the same user. That said, eliciting an apology is not the ultimate goal of complaining in CS references, since they are to a large degree indirect complaints. Alternatively, the success of a complaint on the CS website can be related to its appropriateness in the system. The website offers a set of reference guidelines, which encourage users "not to use abusive or emotional language, and stick to a specific account of your experience" (Couchsurfing 2010). A team of moderators checks the references for compliance to guidelines and may hide or delete inappropriate ones. Essentially, this is the only way in which a CS complaint may fail: as long as it is visible to CS members, a complaint continues to deduct from the addressee's trust capital.

It is to these two ends that CS members employ objectification in the performance of complaints. Objectification strategies are pervasive in our material and crop up more frequently than any other

pragmatic modification strategy. As the analysis has demonstrated, the authors manage objectivity of their report in five distinct ways. Empiricist repertoire and mitigation serve to construct 'out-there-ness', i.e. lack of personal stake in the negative portrayal of the complaine. Witness corroboration and narrative description contribute to the veracity of the report by persuading the audience that the complainable really happened. Finally, script formulations justify the FTA by framing the complaint as a concern for the well-being of other CS members. The objectification of complaints in CS is not only a matter of how a complaint may be performed most effectively; rather, it is an important element in gaining network capital and ensuring successful operation of the location-based social network.

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“You sound very talented” – Negotiating Face in Online Message Boards

1. Introduction

Surprisingly little linguistic research has so far been conducted on online message boards, let alone on (components of) interpersonal relationships to be found therein (but cf. Locher 2006; Arendholz 2013). Still, having a closer look at processes of face constitution and negotiation in one of the most popular as well as diverse forms of online communication is an insightful and rewarding endeavour. For that reason, the present paper sets out to look for traces of face – in both Goffman’s (1967) and Brown/Levinson’s (1978/1987) sense of the term – in message board interaction. To be more precise, selected contributions, i.e. so called posts, taken from the British message board *The Student Room* will be subjected to a qualitative, and as yet explorative analysis. The aim of this investigation is to show that both ideas of the notion of face can be used expediently to explain basic, underlying processes of self-presentation and evaluations by others in this particular online platform. In so doing, special attention will also be paid to the (non-)verbal, medium specific strategies used by self-presenting contributors as well as by evaluating commentators.

2. The nature of the beast: Online message boards and *The Student Room*

The ideational roots of present-day message boards can be traced back to the year 1979, when an experimental bulletin board system called the *Usenet* was set up at Duke University, North Carolina (Jasper 1997: 12). Until its decommissioning in May 2010, the Usenet was a network of host computers which enabled users to contribute messages to so-called newsgroups, in which users could “speak” their minds about (almost) anything with anyone, anytime. Although modern-day online meeting places come in all shapes and forms and go by a remarkable range of names, among them discussion fora, bulletin boards, discussion boards and the term given preference in this study, message boards, they still cover more or less the same basic communicative purposes: getting to know others, looking for like-minded others, asking for advice, asking for opinions, blowing off steam and offering advice/information (cf. Arendholz 2013: 137-138).

The message board under investigation, *The Student Room* (henceforth TSR), serves mainly as a discussion platform for a somewhat homogeneous group of users, i.e. British and international (wannabe) students (URL 1). Once registered, participants are able to contribute to ongoing conversations or generate their own topical threads. They do so by means of typing messages into ready-made templates and by adorning or elaborating their contents with smileys and other instances of what Crystal (2006: 19) used to call *netspeak*¹ as well as with multimodal elements, among them (links to) YouTube videos, photos and the like. Therefore, it goes without

¹ Note well that this term is rather used tongue-in-cheek as a very broad umbrella term. In fact, scholarly research is well-advised to reject the idea of one prototypical online language with clearly defined features (cf., for example, Herring 2001: 616-617; Dürscheid 2004; Thurlow et al. 2004: 123 and Bieswanger 2013: 465).

saying that presenting oneself and evaluating others' behaviour when engaging in asynchronous communicative exchanges can be accomplished in various ways.

Based on previous experiences of message board exchanges, TSR has cast its rules of the game into a code of conduct typical of CMC (URL 2). Besides prohibiting certain actions, e.g. advertising, and giving technical instructions on how to phrase contributions, this netiquette also demands to respect (the privacy of) other users and, most importantly, warns its members that personal attacks or inflammatory behaviour will not be tolerated. Transferred to Goffman's (1967) and Brown/Levinson's (1978/1987) terminology, which was also taken up by more recent authors such as Locher/Watts (2005), Watts (2003) and Spencer-Oatey (2007; cf. older publications), this means that interlocutors' *face needs* shall be valued.

3. Face revisited

3.1. Looking back: Goffman (1967) and Brown/Levinson (1978/1987)

Traditionally, the notion of *face* is tightly linked to two prominent and well-received approaches proposed by sociologist Erving Goffman back in 1967 and by linguists Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson in 1978 (and again in 1987). Although the latter approach references to and further develops lines of thoughts presented by the former, we are still dealing with two rather antithetical conceptions of one and the same notion, *face*. As recent research feels the need to choose between the two rivaling models, the trend is towards sidelining Brown/Levinson's approach in favour of a return to the older Goffmanian model. Before, however, pick-

ing sides too quickly, one should be aware of the advantages of both approaches.

Brown/Levinson (1978/1987) conceive of *face* as a rather static notion and define it as an individual's "public self-image that every member [of a society] wants to claim for himself" (1987: 61). Accordingly,

[...] face is something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction. In general, people cooperate (and assume each other's cooperation) in maintaining face in interaction, such cooperation being based on the mutual vulnerability of face. (Brown/Levinson 1987: 61)

Although both authors concede that *face* is a culture-sensitive notion, they still assume that "the mutual knowledge of members' public self-image or face, and the social necessity to orient oneself to it in interaction, are universal" (Brown/Levinson 1987: 61f.).

What is more, they distinguish between a *positive* and a *negative face*. While the positive face is "the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others" (Brown/Levinson 1987: 62), i.e. the need to be accepted, even liked in a group and to be treated that way, the negative face is described as "the want of every competent adult member that his action be unimpeded by others" (Brown/Levinson 1987: 62), which could roughly be translated as the need to be independent, to have freedom of action, and not to be imposed on by others. As should be obvious, positive and negative face needs exhibit opposing alignments, which makes it hard for us to do justice to both of them at the same time. Although the terminology certainly reflects a rather unfortunate choice and must not be confused with evaluative labels for 'good' or 'bad', the central idea of communicating individuals having basic human needs should not be discarded that easily, as these needs can be the driving forces of our (non-)verbal behaviour,

present not only in message boards for our interlocutors to perceive. Since these needs are inherent in every conversationalist, they are not subject to negotiation in communicative exchanges.

Goffman (1967), on the other hand, puts very strong emphasis on the fact that *face* is the product of processes of negotiation among interlocutors. Thus proffering a social and dynamic perspective on *face*, he defines it as “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact” (Goffman 1967: 5), whereas lines are understood as “pattern[s] of verbal and nonverbal acts by which he expresses [...] his evaluation of the participants, especially himself” (Goffman 1967: 5). In other words, by means of (non-)verbally behaving in a certain way, thus giving out lines for others to make sense of and base their judgments on, speakers aim for the attribution of a certain image, the so-called *face*. In contrast to Brown/Levinson, speakers rely on their interlocutors’ evaluations to be given the desired face, prompting Goffman to remark that

while his social face can be his most personal possession and the centre of his security and pleasure, it is only on loan to him from society; it will be withdrawn unless he conducts himself in a way that is worthy of it. Approved attributes and their relation to face make of every man his own jailer; this is a fundamental social constraint even though each man may like his cell. (Goffman 1967: 10)

In short, one could say that speakers want to convey a self-image by means of their (verbal) behaviour. Their lines can therefore be regarded as the condensate of whom they (think they) are and of whom they would like others to think they are (cf. Arendholz 2013: 67).

3.2. Looking ahead: A proposal for an integrative model of face

There is most certainly more than a grain of truth regarding human, interpersonal interaction in both models, which is why this paper advocates the opinion that we do not have to side with one model or the other but should actually capitalise on the advantages of both approaches. For that reason, an integrative model of *face* is argued for (Arendholz 2013: 75), one that brings together the “best of both worlds” by acknowledging Brown/Levinson’s face dualism and integrating it into Goffman’s dynamic model of face negotiation (see fig. 1):

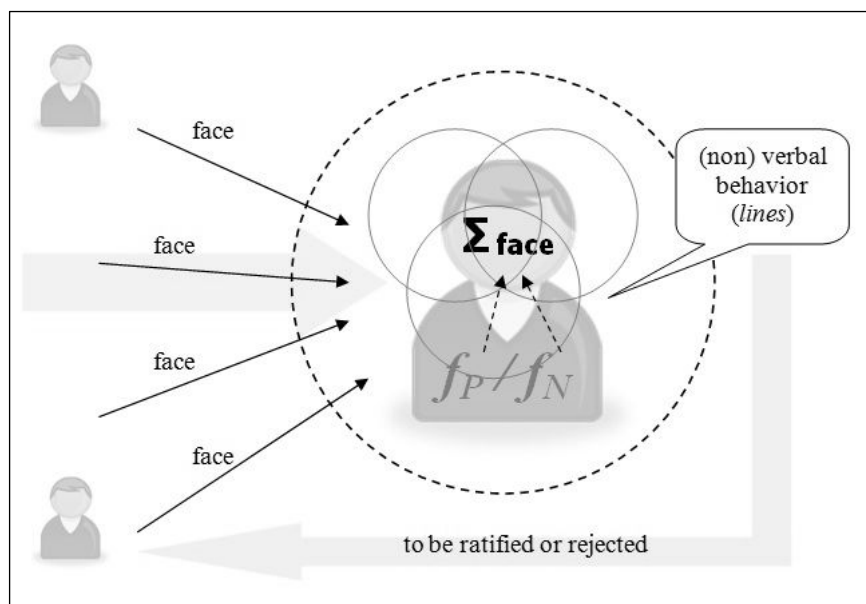


Fig. 1: Schematic representation of an integrative model of face (cf. Arendholz 2013: 76)

In this circular model, the dyadic process between interlocutors is strongly foregrounded with face attribution being the outcome of

a process that includes the ratification or rejection of lines. Based on a speaker's (non-)verbal behaviour, which contains and at the same time conveys lines to be read by interlocutors, *face* is indeed ascribed constantly, individually and temporarily for the moment of interaction. As indicated by the broken line, speakers are not only open for their interlocutors' value judgments but heavily rely on them to either see their face claims met or to rework their lines until the desired face attribution can finally be reached. Since we do not only wear one face at a time but usually showcase a mixture of several faces that have proven advantageous in the past, *face* should in fact be considered a summative conglomerate, indicated by the overlapping circles in Fig. 1.

Just as noteworthy about this integrative model as the Goffmanian influences are the two underlying factors taken over from Brown/Levinson's perspective. The positive and the negative face, abbreviated with f_P and f_N in Fig. 1, are allocated an equally fixed place right in the center of the schematic representation, as they represent interlocutors' fundamental human needs for association and dissociation (cf. O'Driscoll 1996). Tannen elaborates on this as follows:

We need to get close to each other to have a sense of community, to feel we're not alone in the world. But we need to keep our distance from each other to preserve our independence, so others don't impose on or engulf us. This duality reflects the human condition. We are individual and social creatures. We need other people to survive, but we want to survive as individuals. (Tannen 1992: 15)

Therefore, everything that we say or do, be it online or otherwise, can directly be traced back to these two central driving forces as they form the basis of every process of face negotiation. Despite the fact that their implementation in actual talk exchanges can differ significantly, which means that we can pursue highly individual ways of ensuring our positive and negative face needs, their

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mere presence should not be questioned. After all, it is these basic human needs that shape our behavioural expectations with regard to ourselves and those around us and, even more importantly, that make these kinds of expectations assumed to be mutual and thus shared.

4. Traces of underlying face dualism in TSR

In applying these insights to actual communicative exchanges in TSR, we will have a look at underlying face needs first. The reason for this course of action can be seen in the fact that we need to be aware of the driving forces of interlocutors' behaviour, i.e. their most basic face wants, before we can even think about analysing more complex cycles of face negotiation. With this in mind, let us look for traces of face dualism in TSR.

On the one hand, a user's positive face need, i.e. his² need for association, finds expression in multifarious ways when he creates an account in order to get involved in the message board business, which is why the following list is certainly not exhaustive: Users verbally contribute to the discussion at hand (maybe even on a regular basis) and, in so doing, share (private) information. Sometimes, they also assume responsibility by becoming a moderator, extend their buddy lists, join so-called societies³ within TSR, and accomplish many other things. The following example (see fig. 2) bears witness to the positive face need.

² Note that the pronouns *he/his* etc. are used generically to address both male and female referents alike.

³ Societies are designed to bring together like-minded users under one heading, thus signaling a mutual interest in music, politics, sports teams and the like.

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Fig. 2: TSR post showcasing the need for association

In her⁴ post, the user *superfrankie* illustrates the need for association. In one of her first posts ever (see number of posts, top right), she graphically shares very personal information and emotions with perfect strangers in order to introduce herself, make contact with like-minded others, be liked and finally become part of the group and find her place within TSR. The same impression is conveyed when looking at her profile. This template allows users to give personal information in sections such as “Bio”, “Where you study”, “Academic info”, “Interests” etc. *superfrankie* makes ardent use of the possibility to present herself to future acquaintances by filling out every section meticulously, again divulging personal details willingly.

On the other hand, a user’s need for dissociation, or his negative face, is also mirrored in behaviour visible in TSR. This time, however, the aim is to keep one’s distance in order to protect one’s privacy and one’s autonomy. This can, among other things, be

⁴ Although we can never be sure about the real-life sex of a TSR-member, the sex indicated by the symbol next to the nickname will be taken at face value for the sake of convenience.

achieved by using nicknames and unrelated avatars instead of authentic personal items and thus also by refraining from disclosing (links to) private information and from joining societies. In this vein, requests for friendship are ignored and contributions are responded to in ironic, mocking, even insulting ways. Explicitly stating disinterest in a topic can also count as one of many ways to protect one's negative face.

However, the question that arises with regard to the last few strategies to safeguard one's freedom of action is this: Why answer at all, if all one is willing to give is a topically and/or interpersonally inappropriate answer? Such behaviour could account for the struggle between the positive and the negative face. As suggested before, it is rarely possible to meet positive and negative face needs at the same time, i.e. to be part of the group and still be one's own master. In this case, it could very well be that users wish to participate but still feel the need to either signal explicitly or at least protect implicitly their autonomy. This holds also true for parts of *superfrankie's* post (see fig. 2). Although it serves as a perfect example for the need of association, there are also traces of the need for dissociation. Why else would she have chosen an avatar that neutrally displays strawberries instead of uploading a photo of hers? Rather subconsciously, her positive face must be struggling with her negative face about the question of how much she needs to disclose about herself in order to reach her communicative goal, i.e. belong to the group.

We can thus conclude that although the avoidance of affiliation in the broadest sense of the word is rather atypical, if not even counterproductive for the collaborative nature of message boards, we still find instances that prove this point. Here is another example, demonstrating the need for dissociation (see fig. 3):



Fig. 3: TSR profile showcasing the need for dissociation

This screenshot displays the profile of an experienced user. We know so based on several clues: For one thing, he has earned himself the status⁵ of a “TSR Demigod”; for another, he has a large collection of green gems. These represent positive reputation and are awarded by fellow users for contributions in previous conversations that particularly met with their approval. So despite – or maybe even just because of – the fact that this user is not a rookie anymore, he never bothered to fill out his profile and to disclose any personal background information. Consequently, he protects his privacy and attends to his need for dissociation. This does not, however, mean that interactants behave similarly secretive in

⁵ Based on active participation, which results in a raised number of contributions, the system ascribes so-called *labels*, which indicate a user’s status. Being a “TSR Demigod” thus hints to a long lasting and active membership.

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other templates, let alone in their postings, which might indeed prove to be very insightful (see fig. 2).

In changing perspective from the presenting self to the evaluating other usually involved in dyadic encounters, the remainder of this section fathoms some possible interlocutors' reactions to the two basic human face needs, starting with the need for association. In supporting someone's positive face needs, interlocutors generally uphold interaction and in so doing accomplish various other interpersonally relevant matters, such as looking for common ground, inviting people into a society, offering friendship, giving positive reputation by distributing green gems (see above), praising someone and many more. The following screenshot details a very TSR-specific way of attending to someone's positive face needs (see fig. 4):

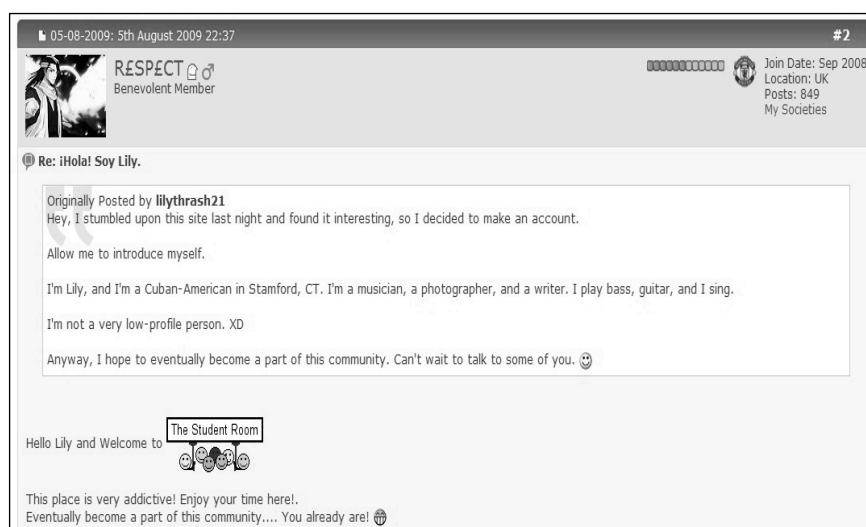


Fig. 4: Attending to positive face needs

By closing her post with the words “Anyway, I hope to eventually become a part of this community. Can’t wait to talk to some of

you", *lilythrash21* makes explicit her positive face needs. As can also be seen in fig. 4, *R£SP£CT* reacts in a very supportive way: He welcomes her with a typical TSR-smiley and states "You already are!", thereby declaring her a part of this community and explicitly attending to her positive face needs.

Then again this need for association does not necessarily have to be supported, but can also be threatened in various ways: Interaction can be withheld deliberately and some users are ignored. Moreover, answers, when given, can be entirely inappropriate – topically as well as interpersonally – possibly resulting in bullying or flaming behaviour.⁶ Another TSR-specific means of showing someone depreciation is by giving that user negative reputation, i.e. red gems (see above).

Similar observations can be made when considering possible reactions to negative face needs. Again, this need can either be supported, e.g. when users respect someone's privacy, accept nicknames, do not press for further information or tolerate other opinions without picking a fight. Last but not least, this particular face need can also be threatened, for example by users that pressure someone to share more than he is willing to or by going even one step further and disclosing information about the other single-handedly (e.g. photos, private mails, links etc.). Again, these lists just give some insights and do not claim to be exhaustive.

⁶ Among the many readings of the term *flaming*, Thurlow et al. define it as "hostile and aggressive interaction" (2004: 70).

5. Processes of face negotiation in TSR

5.1. Explicit vs. implicit face attribution

Another way of reacting to *lilythrash21*'s first contribution can be seen in the following screenshot (fig. 5):

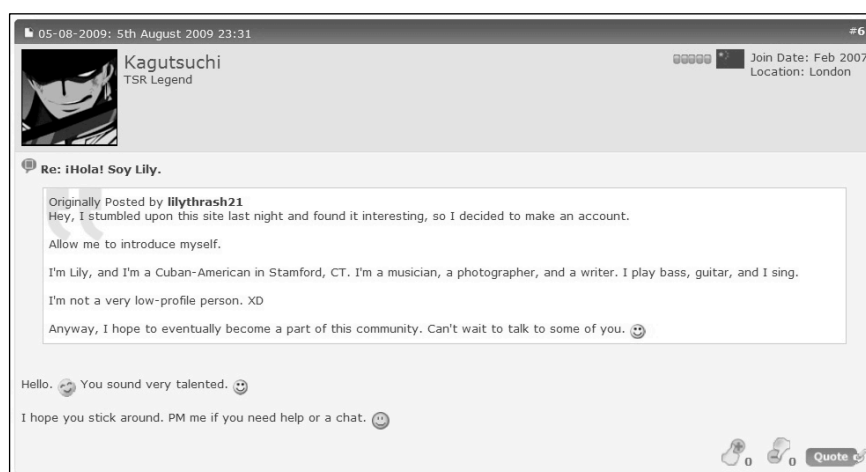


Fig. 5: Explicit face attribution

Again, *lilythrash21*'s positive face need is respected, as her interlocutor not only responds to her, but also does so in a very friendly and supportive way.⁷ This example can, however, be analysed beyond the boundaries of Brown/Levinson's view of face. Although it is vitally important to acknowledge the underlying face dualism as the initial driving force behind all the interpersonal processes involved, we can, in fact, go one step further and detect a process of face negotiation as laid out by Goffman.

⁷ Although an ironic reading of "you sound very talented" can never be discarded entirely, the surrounding context in the thread strongly suggests a non-ironic reading.

Besides expressing her wish to become part of the group (see above), *lilythrash21* first and foremost introduces herself by verbally disclosing details about her character and her hobbies, thus giving her interlocutors an impression of whom they are dealing with – or rather of whom she would like them to think they are dealing with. In cases like these, the notion of *face* could therefore be used synonymously with the term *image* – as found, for example, in Holly (1979) and also in everyday talk. In Goffman's terminology, *lilythrash21* gives out lines for others to make sense of and, in the end, to give her face. We can only speculate whether the outcome of that face attribution is really the one that *lilythrash21* anticipated. What we can, however, see is that her interlocutor, *Kagutsuchi*, obviously perceives lines contained in her original contribution – among them "I'm a musician, a photographer, and a writer. I play bass, guitar, and I sing" – only to ratify and accept them. With his evaluative statement "You sound very talented", *Kagutsuchi* makes his conclusion explicit and gives her face, namely that of a talented person. I propose to call the outcome of this face negotiation process an *explicit face attribution*.

Of course, face attributions are not necessarily explicit but can also be made implicitly. An example for an *implicit face attribution* can be found in the same thread (see fig. 6):

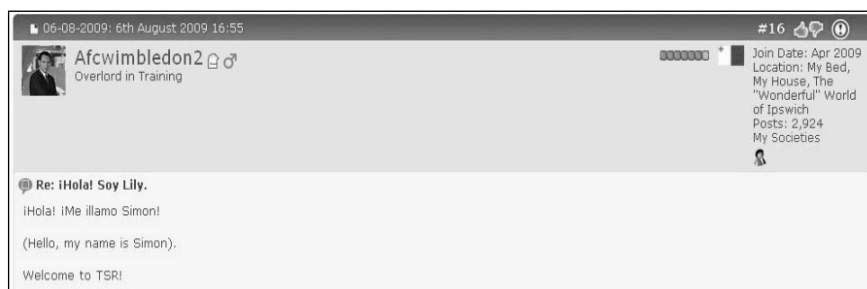


Fig. 6: Implicit face attribution

The line which sets this particular face negotiation process and ultimately the face attribution in motion is conveyed by the heading. Usually, contributions, including their headings, are expected to be phrased in English (see netiquette, section 2). *lilythrash21*, however, chose to make her first appearance with a Spanish heading (“Hola! Soy Lily!”), thus communicating a line, *viz.* of her having a Spanish-speaking background and most likely being fluent in that language. In his first (out of several) responses to her, *Afcwimbledon2* perceives her line, i.e. her language choice, gives her the face of someone being capable of understanding Spanish and thus decides to formulate his adjacent contribution in Spanish as well. Consequently, not only does he reply to her post, what he also does is implicitly ratify her face claim.

When analysing message boards, there is, however, another means of communicating face attributions. Besides the purely verbal display of face evaluations that we have dealt with so far, users can also rely on the pictorial mode, which is just as well suited to transmit evaluations and face attributions. After all, an animated smiley that is rolling on the floor laughing and pointing does get across just as clear a message. The same holds true for this exceptional “smiley” also available in TSR (see fig. 7):



Fig. 7: A troll as a means of delivering face attributions

Answering to someone’s contribution with a picture of a troll expresses – in not so many words – that the content and/or the author of the preceding contribution is not taken seriously. Lines present in this message are, for whatsoever reason, not taken at face value and resultant face claims are not ratified but rejected. For

that reason, the only face attribution possible could be phrased as follows: I don't believe who/how you pretend to be. You are a troll.⁸

5.2. Explicit and implicit face attributions in complex processes of face negotiation

So far, we have been concerned with processes of face negotiation that strictly involved only two interlocutors, i.e. the presenting self that transmits lines for the receiving, interpreting other to come to a conclusion about the first user's face. This does not, however, mean that the role of the interpreting other is assumed by only one other person. On the contrary, and as is often the case in face-to-face as well as in message board interaction, interlocutors can be faced with a crowd of interpreting others to give him face. It is therefore only natural that the outcome of these face attribution processes can differ with each evaluating mind.

The following, rather complex example bears witness to a multi-party face negotiation process, involving again implicit and explicit face attributions. It is taken from a thread entitled "How to stop strange people speaking to me" (URL 3), which is set in motion by the opening post (OP) of a presumably female user who asks for advice on how to get rid of chatty strangers on her daily train commute. This first post triggered a lot of more or less helpful responses, leading to a branched hierarchy typical of message boards, in which users either answer directly to the first post or comment on comments. The springboard for the present analysis

⁸ Donath explains *trolling* as follows: "[Y]ou set your fishing lines in the water and then slowly go back and forth dragging the bait and hoping for a bite. Trolling on the Net is the same concept – someone baits a post and then waits for the bite on the line and then enjoys the ensuing fight" (1999: 45). Trolling is thus a game in which some participants regularly and intentionally play with their face (attributions).

is post 9, a piece of advice given by a user who calls himself *n0c0ntr0l*. Both this nickname and the content of this user's posts (marked in grey in Tab. 1) send out lines to be picked up by altogether six different fellow-users (kept in white in Tab. 1), who take turns in evaluating these lines and in attributing rather similar faces to *n0c0ntr0l*. Graphically, this conversational excerpt can be depicted as follows (see Tab. 1):⁹

1 = OP					
	→ 9	→ 14	→ 18	→ 21	
				→ 24	→ 30
				→ 28	
		→ 22	→ 29	→ 31	→ 32

Tab. 1: Structure of excerpt under discussion

Since it is not possible to go into detail with every single contribution, only some of them will be selected to be discussed exemplarily. To start with, here is *n0c0ntr0l*'s first contribution:

post 9: You can tell them to f off. Wouldn't work on me, but on other less confident guys. MP3 Player works well too. But that ain't ever stopped me either, so really just be polite and if they creep you out move.

We could argue that the lines contained in this post are laid out to give him the face of someone who is self-confident and successful at what he does. It is interesting to see that by speaking of "other less confident guys", he explicitly attributes face to himself. Considering, however, the fact that his interlocutors are the ones judging about his face, we need to have a look at the two immediate reactions:

⁹ For the sake of intelligibility, only the topically relevant posts are quoted here, leaving, however, the original numbering of all posts untouched. Note that posts 24 and 28 should be read as direct reactions to post 18 just as post 22 is a direct reaction to post 9.

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post 14: You do realise how bad you make yourself sound right?
[...]

post 22: If a girl told you to f- off you wouldn't take a hint and
leave her alone? 🙄

In these two subsequent comments, *n0c0ntr0l* is attributed face; explicitly in post 14 and implicitly in post 22, in which the smiley at the end of the turn accomplishes most of the evaluative work. It is highly questionable, though, if this face attribution is the one that *n0c0ntr0l* was pursuing in the first place. For this reason, *n0c0ntr0l* seems to feel the need to take action so that he is given the desired face. He does so by responding to these two posts, sending out more lines, as, for example, in post 18:

post 18 (reaction to post 14):

Last time I hit on a girl on a train she originally told me to f off. 20 minutes later she was giving me her number and asking for mine. I'm good at what I do.

Once more, that fact that *n0c0ntr0l* perceives himself as a very successful communicative partner becomes especially visible in his turn-closing remark "I'm good at what I do.", which can again be interpreted as an explicit self-attribution. At the same time, it is also a line to be taken as a basis for further face attributions carried out by his fellow-users.

6. Conclusion

As could be shown with the help of examples, both readings of face complement each other when describing self-presentations and their evaluations in online message boards. The integrative model of face has thus proven to be use- and meaningful for the analysis of the negotiation of face in the limited range of examples

discussed. Certainly, face constitution in message boards imitates processes of face-to-face interaction – after all, we can hardly shake off norms and behavioural patterns that we have come to be so acquainted with just because we go online. The only difference lies in the vehicles used for both the transmission of lines and for the attribution of face. Although the purely verbal display within posts still dominates in both cases, other means of achieving these two goals can also be witnessed. In fact, a lot of lines are (repeatedly) present in every single post, as they form part of templates that are inserted automatically by the system, among them telling information contained in the number of posts, the reputation system or the label. Other lines are also provided systematically by the message board, but reflect deliberate choices made by users prior to their contributions, such as nicknames, avatars, headings, sometimes also the affiliation to TSR-societies. Besides these central templates within posts, there are also peripheral ones accompanying posts that also lend themselves as carriers of lines to be interpreted by interlocutors, *viz.* profile information and links to external personal webpages (e.g. on *facebook*). When it comes to the evaluation of these lines and the attribution of face, we have differentiated between implicit and explicit face attributions, delivered verbally and/or with the help of expressive smileys. In conclusion, piecing together online faces and evaluating them means operating message contents but also templates.

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Part III

FACE THREATENING AND FACE FLATTERING IN ONLINE COMMUNICATION

Christiane Maaß – Hildesheim

On the Markedness of Communication on Online Message Boards as Part of a Perception-Oriented Politeness Approach

1. Introduction

Then, too, the wraithlike nature of electronic communication – the flesh become word, the sender reincarnated as letter on a terminal screen – accelerates the escalation of hostilities once tempers flare; disembodied, sometimes pseudonymous combatants tend to feel that they can hurl insults with impunity (at least without fear of bodily harm). (Dery 1994: 1)

In this well-known quotation, the author and media critic Mark Dery mentions a phenomenon that has now been taken up by linguistic research (see inter alia Graham 2008 and several articles in this volume): the affinity of internet communication to aggressive verbal outbursts. This phenomenon is often referred to as “flaming” and basically exists across platforms. For example, as Helfrich notes in her contribution to this volume on flaming in YouTube comments, “flaming” is a “particular means of face work practiced in Social Media”, the main function of which is “displaying hostility” (Helfrich, this volume). In such “leave-a-comment” platforms, the phenomenon of verbal aggression occurs at a significantly more pronounced degree compared to communi-

cation on online message boards, which are the subject of my study. The reasons lie in the communication structure provided by different online platforms, which differ with regard to their grounding in the communicative situation. Taking the cooking forum on the cooking platform www.mundorecetas.com as an example, I will show which codes (partly media-specific) the communication members use to ground their communication in order to perceive and understand each other. This helps them to minimise problems of understanding and to foster an environment in which communication partners usually care about and appreciate each other. The members prevent potential misinterpretations of their contributions and practice face work actively. This kind of face work is multicode and plays an important role in preventing negatively oriented “relational management” (according to Watts/Locher 2005). This multicode face work can be found both in the text of the post itself and in the framing peritext (profile information, signature, etc.). If such codes are not used, or are inadequately applied, as the corpus shows, the risk of misunderstandings that trigger the exchange of FTAs is inevitable.

In this article, I argue that internet communication produces marked behaviour in a distinct form, both negatively and positively marked. With recourse to a perception-oriented politeness approach, I would like to show that users of message boards are often not sure how they should classify utterances. In particular, the intentionality of utterances is often debated (“did he really mean it?”). Such negotiation processes are to a large extent face-threatening for the “discussed third” (two or more discussing parties commenting on a third party on an online message board) and often lead to the degeneration of discussions.

This article is divided into seven parts. After the introduction, I will explain the way in which the corpus was approached and then present the online message boards in their mediality. In the

fourth section, I will show the nature of the communication problems in online communication, based on the communication model of Strohner 2006/Kercher 2011. The subsequent fifth section is devoted to verbal, nonverbal and paraverbal codes available on online message boards and used for face work. Then, in section six, the focus will be on less successful online communication. By taking a thread from the forum Mundorecetas as an example, I will show how misunderstandings in communication lead to FTAs. The paper concludes with a summary of the results.

2. The material investigated

For the present study, I examined threads from the Spanish-speaking cooking forum Mundorecetas. The website started as a cooking forum in 2000 and has now been extended to include other areas of everyday family life (such as pregnancy, manual work, diet, etc.). Active participation in the cooking forum requires an interest in a specific everyday topic – cooking – with the result that recognisable common ground between contributors is available. Mundorecetas endeavours to strengthen the community of practice in the forum. Users can join thematic groups where they can upload photo albums and share them with other users, etc. In addition, there are the common hierarchies between users: users can progress through active participation levels in the forum from novice to chef. For my contribution, I investigated threads from this forum without quantitative evaluation;¹ examples show only tendencies and typical manifestations.

¹ A larger corpus study of face work in internet forums is still a desideratum; currently in this field, a corpus study is being carried out by Uta Fröhlich (a PhD project), which is represented by a face-term contribution to this volume. In this study multicodality of

A potential problem in the scholarly description of multimedial face work is dealing with the data. Anonymisation is not possible when statements are made about the choice of nicknames or avatar images used, for instance. Anyway, the information is publicly accessible on the internet because registration on the platform for the sake of inspection is not required. An illustration of imagery is covered by the right of quotation; therefore, the data in the present study may be used without anonymisation. However, nicknames and avatars are shown only when they are actually the subject of my presentation. The citations are inserted as screenshots to depict the multimediality in at least a static form.

3. Communication on online message boards

Herring (2007) denominated criteria to describe the characteristics of online media platforms that provide an easy way to represent the characteristics of communication on online message boards:

- 1) Synchronicity: communication on online message boards is asynchronous, but much like most other online platforms, the time span of the response is shorter than that of offline writings; therefore, users tend to submit their posts without reconsidering them.
- 2) Message transmission: unlike in chat situations, the interlocutors do not see that a post is being composed. Only the finished and sent posts are visible on the platform.
- 3) Persistence of transcript: once written, a post remains permanently visible and cannot be edited by the author. Posts are usually visible to all those who surf the internet even without

face work is processed with a systematical investigation with focus on a Spanish-speaking cinema forum.

having to log in to a platform. This has implications for face work because utterances judged to be impolite are unchangeable, always visible and accessible for externals.

- 4) Size of the message buffer: The posts can be of any size. A maximum limit lies in what the addressee still wants to read. When messages become very long, metalinguistic-related utterances often occur. The posters are then accused of being rude because they take up too much of the readers' time – so face work also occurs on this level.
- 5) Channels of communication: Message boards are regular hypertexts; data in different formats and codalities (photos, videos, audio files, etc.) can be embedded according to the platform.
- 6) Anonymous messaging: Active participation usually requires registration. The data given do not get verified as a rule, so that users can use their imagination when creating their profiles. How often this happens depends on the extent to which a community of practice is integrated.² Most forum members write under a pseudonym. The users choose nicknames with a phonetic quality through which they (intentionally or not) try to influence their face positively. The anonymity of the communication on online message boards was recently attacked by politicians and held responsible for the aggressiveness of the communication in forums. I do not think that that lies in anonymity, nor is it the main reason for such behaviour. The lack of grounding in the situation plays an important role here (more on this below).
- 7) Private messaging: Here, the platforms vary. Some of them allow private messaging to individual users directly from the profile, while other platforms do not provide private messaging. The postings as such are always public. However, it is

² Cf. Kluge's contribution about trolling in the present volume.

often possible for community members to contact each other dialogically through the platform itself or by using email or other platforms (e.g. Facebook).

- 8) Filtering: Since the threads are public, no filters are used there. Some forums (including Mundorecetas) do, however, allow filtering of personal contacts.
- 9) Quoting: In most forums, there is an automatic comment function through which a previous post or parts of it can be taken and discussed in the reply. This function provides a better orientation, especially when one refers to a post based on a contribution made several posts previously. However, such quoting also often leads to resentment, because users are held to their sometimes very spontaneous utterances. Here, the informality of the exchange collides with the permanence of the form: what has been said remains permanently visible and quotable.
- 10) Message format: The basic form of the posts is determined by the platform. Usually, the individual contributions are framed by the users' profile information. These have great influence on face work, and this factor is discussed thoroughly below. In many forums (including Mundorecetas), the users also have design options for their text messages (font style, colours, etc.) and they also embed such paraverbal elements for face work.

Communication on online message boards, just like other online communication, is not very easy to locate on the closeness-distance continuum according to Koch/Oesterreicher (2011). Typical features of distance language are publicity, lack of grounding in the communicative situation and finality. The latter collides with a quality of typical linguistic closeness in communication on online message boards. Little planning effort is made. In addition, this communication, as has already been established, tends to be emotional, dialogical and spontaneous. The preference for non-linguistic codes is very distinct (more on this below). The physical

distance does not entirely relate to this criterion, because the users are in a shared virtual space which can be configured by the communicating members within the guidelines of the platform.

4. Pitfalls of the communication on online message boards: understanding and misunderstanding

Previous studies have already discovered increased aggression in the preceding format of internet forums, namely mailing lists (cf. inter alia, Arendholz 2013; Graham 2008; Maaß 2012). One reason that this is recurrently mentioned is the anonymity of these platforms. However, this anonymity in internet forums is not so distinct with a well-formed community of practice,³ where even sometimes offline contacts are likely (usually with an online-to-offline directionality, cf. Dayter/Rüdiger, this volume). In the cooking forum, many female communicators give information about their lives and well-being quite openly. Many of them are very active in the forum and contacts deepen with time.

Communication is therefore not anonymous in the strict sense of the word. What significantly characterises offline communication in a face-to-face situation, however, is the grounding in the communicative situation. The interlocutor and communicator are now not in a face-to-face situation, but they interact on a common online platform that can be configured (and is actually configured) as a virtual place. In addition, the participants carry out similar cooking acts offline, which they share online. Thus, the online plat-

³ Lave and Wenger describe CoP as a “participation in an activity system about which participants share understanding” (Lave/Wenger 1991: 91, cited by Darics 2010: 135).

form deviates from direct offline communication in its possibilities. The model of Strohner (2006: 191, here in the modification by Kercher 2011) is well suited for illustrating the impact of this situation on the intelligibility of posts on a message board:

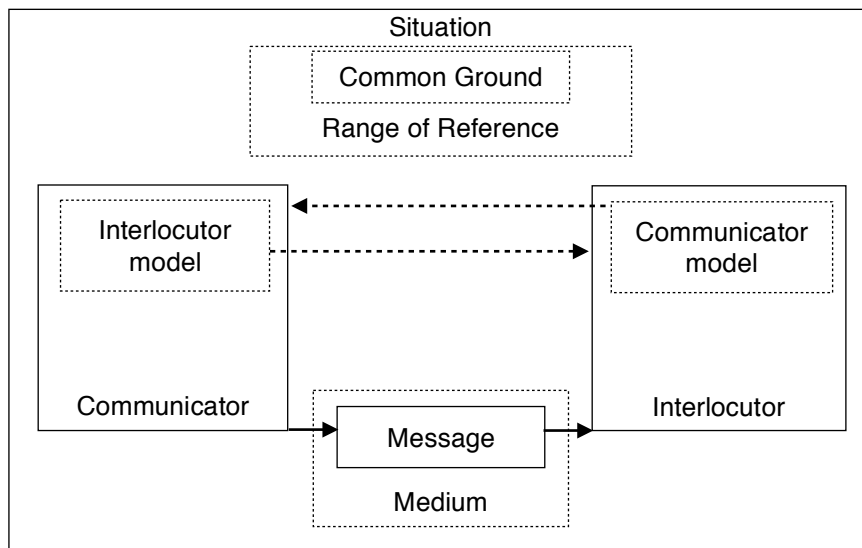


Diagram 1: Text comprehension as a process of mutual understanding between interlocutor and communicator, Kercher (2011: 59) based on Strohner (2006).

Kercher (2011: 59f.) argues that text comprehension is the result of a process of understanding between an interlocutor and a communicator. He distinguishes between manifest factors (solid line in the model) and latent factors (broken lines in the model). Hence, in a communicative act, a communicator conveys a message to an interlocutor in a particular situational context. Text comprehension is influenced by the following factors: the medium through which the message is conveyed, the common ground of the communication members, the reference area of the utterance and the image that the communicator and the interlocutor have of each other.

Online communication deviates here considerably from offline face-to-face communication. Due to the medial embedding of the message, the communicator and the interlocutor usually do not visually perceive each other while they communicate. The range of reference must be fully verbalised or displayed with other paraverbal and nonverbal codes; deictics are only available in a limited fashion. But online communication is not homogeneous: the platforms vary distinctively from each other. The aforementioned leave-a-comment platforms create a media environment in which the communicator and the interlocutor know nothing about their possibly existing common ground. Beyond the message and the communication event itself, they do not have any clues to help them build a communicator or interlocutor model. The interlocutor remains “faceless” for the communicator, and the interlocutor perceives the communicator merely through his utterance. The utterances are not grounded in the communicative situation, which results in verbal aggressiveness on the one hand and misunderstandings on the other. This is different in the case of communication on online message boards: the users have the possibility to configure the situational parameters and thus facilitate understanding of their own utterances. The stronger the integration into the community of practice becomes, the more significant these mechanisms are.

The model of Strohner (2006)/Kercher (2011) is, as is often the case in communication models, unidirectional, and focuses on situations with only two communicants. The unidirectionality can easily be compensated for by considering a thread of posts on an online message board as a succession of reversals of the model in which the actual interlocutor becomes a communicator and so on. Communication in forums is also mostly not dialogical; rather, there is a multilateral exchange within the community of practice. This exacerbates the problems of understanding once again, be-

cause the common ground in a loosely constituted group is more threatened than that in a stable dialogic interaction. In addition, we find typical power negotiation processes just as in open groups. Different roles become created, such as the role of the defender, who more or less effectively represents the position of another and in most cases commits FTAs (cf. Maaß 2012). The group of interlocutors is unrecognisable to the communicator in terms of its scope. There is an undetermined number of passive eavesdroppers who do not speak for themselves. This is called lurking (Graham 2008). This phenomenon is known to the communicators and conditions their perception of FTAs just like that of FEAs: they are pronounced in front of an audience of indeterminate size that witnesses the face loss or face gain of one interlocutor (Maaß 2012). Therefore, the 'online message board' medium, by its very nature, provides a communication environment that is not entirely "safe" and may trigger quite aggressive behaviour.

5. Multicodal hints for interpretation and grounding of utterances

This section is devoted to users' behaviour on online message boards. How do they avoid misunderstandings and compensate for the lack of grounding in the communicative situation? Code systems have emerged in online communication with which the lack of grounding can be, at least partially, compensated for. With the help of these codes, the participants ground their utterances in the communicative situation, and that is why such codes play an important role in face work. These codes can be verbal, paraverbal and nonverbal. They are used in different places on the message board: on the one hand, in the posts themselves – in this case I speak of face work in the basic text – and on the other hand in the

accompanying texts that usually surround each individual post in the forum: profile picture (avatar, static or animated), nickname, status information on membership and activity in the forum, signature (motto, timeline, etc.; static or animated). Here I speak of face work in the peritext, using the term of Genette (1987). The different codes are now presented by means of examples taken from the forums of Mundorecetas.

5.1. Verbal, paraverbal and nonverbal codes

5.1.1. Verbal code

Most of the contributions to politeness and face work in online communication focus on the verbal code, despite the fact that forums and other online communication forms are recognisably and inherently of a multicode nature. Verbal utterances may convey messages of all kinds; but most interesting for face work, including others, are such utterances that show components of verbal politeness₂ or impoliteness₂. Links that connect posts play an interesting role (e.g. in the form of hinting that the topic has already been the subject of a thread on the forum). They often point to other contents on the web, too, and thus bring new explanations and background information into the current debates. In this way, they help to construct experts in the discussion – a strategy that is of great importance for face work (cf. the contributions of Schrader-Kniffki and Kunkel to this volume).

Consider this example: the communicator signals that he appreciated the information that nacho has given in the previous post, and applies very classic verbal means of politeness₂: praise, thanks, and expressions of intimacy (kissing).

todo perfecto nacho gracias, muakkkkkk

Example 1

5.1.2. Paraverbal codes

These are codes that are directly connected to the verbal signs. Such codes occur very prominently in communication on online message boards. In many forums, it is possible to use html in the posts. The contributors can then determine the font colour / font size / typeface themselves, which is also the case in Mundorecetas. Usually, contributors do not present the whole post in large purple italics online; rather, they restrict the use of these means to specific purposes. In ex. 2, the communicator shapes the name of the addressee in bright coloured capitals with a greatly enlarged font:



Example 2

The contributor forgot to congratulate the addressee (whose nickname on the forum is Xusy) on climbing to the next level in the hierarchy: this member has acquired the necessary points to get promoted and become *subjefa de cocina* ('sous-chef')! The communicator is making up for it now with an inside joke that alludes to a lower level in the hierarchy ("pinche", 'cook's mate'), which Xusy had surmounted long ago. The contributor codes her emo-

tional involvement by paraverbal and nonverbal means, and so she marks that there is a difference between the proposition (what she actually says) and the illocution (what she really means) of her utterance. She also signals recognition and closeness by the graphic highlighting of the name.

A much-described feature of online communication (cf. Crystal 2001) is the cross-platform usage of graphic strategies such as acronyms (e.g., LOL “laughing out loud”, CUL8R “see you later”, bn “bueno”, etc.), uppercase and graphic elongations, which are also found on Spanish online message boards. English acronyms are also frequently used alongside the Spanish acronyms on Spanish online message boards. In Mundorecetas, such acronyms are rare; this may be due to the user structure: many users on this platform do not belong to the generation of Digital Natives, but are mostly women, and to a lesser degree men, of all ages.

However, the emphatic capital letters can also be found in the forum of Mundorecetas, as we have seen in ex. 2, which also contains a further widespread graphic strategy: graphic elongations. These elongations need not correspond to a phonic realisation, even if they are often shown to be as such in the research. Darics (2010) describes graphic elongations as “strategies to represent auditory information”; the elongation is “aimed to evoke a sound effect”, which will be interpreted by the addressee because of their “previous experience in spoken interactions in general” (Darics 2010: 135f.). This is possible in individual cases but does not comply with their application in online communication in general. It is often the last grapheme of a word or a syllable that is lengthened, and not the nucleus of the stressed syllable. In ex. 2, this is not so clear, because after all a vowel is lengthened and the word stays pronounceable. In the following example, the elongation is not easy to articulate: Pronouncing a word with an elongated [s] is

hard to imagine, and pronouncing a word with an elongated [k], as in ex. 1, is simply impossible.



Example 3

These elongations are therefore a purely graphic strategy and show a clear decoupling from offline practices. Online communication has made a separate development, the paraverbal and non-verbal codes are not mere transfers of conventional offline facial or gestural codes or certain intonation patterns. They are used in online communication to signal emphasis. They occur more frequently in utterances with phatic, expressive or conative functions. All three functions – different from the referential – are typically directed to face work: establishing contact, ending the post (bidding farewell), requesting and thanking, congratulating, etc. These actions may be appropriate to the situation at the respective place, but by emphasising them, they move from the unmarked area to an emphatically stressed, marked area. Below, I will further discuss this and what it means for face work.

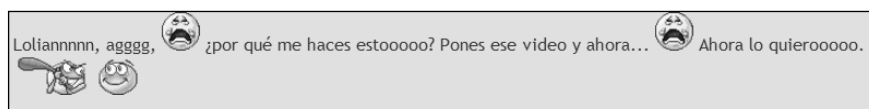
5.1.3. Nonverbal codes

Here, the first to be mentioned are emoticons. They play a special role in online communication across platforms: they are frequently applied by users worldwide and have already attracted the attention of research in a very diverse way.⁴ It is often stated that emoticons reproduce facial expressions and gestures in the text. A

⁴ Examples of which are Dresner/Herring 2010 and 2012, Greiffenstern 2010 and Darics 2010. Dresner and Herring detected that emoticons not only “transport” emotions but also construct meaning.

representative of this point of view is the study of Darics, which considers smileys as “strategies to represent visual information” (2010: 135). I do not agree. Rather, emoticons have evolved into a unique code that has become clearly decoupled from offline practices. A mere transfer does not take place. This is evident in, among other examples, the case of such emoticons that do not exclusively represent facial expressions. Consider the smiley with the sunglasses, which exists both in the different versions as a gif (see ex. 2) and as a string of characters B-). It does not depict facial expressions and does not correspond to visual perception. The way it is used and its skopos are heterogeneous: it can be related to people and expressions. In ex. 2, it is used to characterise the verbal components as indirect speech acts.

Emoticons available on online message boards as (usually animated) gifs can also represent small interactions. An interesting example of this is found in 4. Here, the communicator formulated a fictitious reproach against the addressee Lolian, which however enhances Lolian’s face: she is presented as a proud owner of a wonderful pressure cooker that all would like to have:



Example 4

Verbal and nonverbal means in the field of impoliteness₂ are used for face work here. Reproaches are formulated and emoticons that convey negative facial expressions and gestures (crying and beating) are used. The paraverbal features (font colour, graphic elongations) that appear next to the emoticons in the post support its interpretation as indirectly polite (for more see below). Verbal, nonverbal and paraverbal codes are in contrast here and make the

post seem emphatically polite. It is very clear here that the degree of politeness cannot be simply inferred from the verbal and non-verbal means used in an utterance. The emoticons and nonverbal signals disambiguate the message; they give a guideline to the interpretation and thus contribute to the understanding of the text. They prevent the erroneous judgment of a post as inappropriate.

Other than emoticons, various other nonverbal codes can be found on online message boards. Graphics (static or animated) or photos can be embedded on most platforms. Some platforms, including *Mundorecetas*, allow direct embedding of videos and audio files, while others only allow weblinks to these media. In ex. 4, the communicator refers to a video which her addressee Lolian directly embedded in her previous post. Photos are very frequent in the cooking forum, showing photographed food, family members, gifts etc. One shows proudly what one owns and so urges the addressees to practice face work. An example of this is found in 5. Martta posts photos of the sumptuous communion cake that she made for her niece, and invites the interlocutors to virtually have a piece (“*espero que os guste*” – ‘I hope you enjoy it’). She gets 32 consistently positive responses, all of which refer to the posted photos which are added to prove that Martta is capable of the properties rated in the forum (preparing good and visually appealing food and uploading and commenting pictures of it). Posting and discussing the pictures is consequently used for face work.

Various codes are therefore used for face work on online message boards. Graham (2008: 285) refers to paraverbal and nonverbal codes such as abbreviations, uppercase letters or emoticons as “text-based approximations of interactional markers” and underlines that they are not complex enough for the speaker’s intentions, as they do not function as effectively as their offline correspondences. I do not think that this is the actual reason. In contrast to facial expressions, gestures and prosody in an offline situation,

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online paraverbal and nonverbal codes must be explicitly inserted into the text. One needs to ascribe them intentionality to a certain extent; their proficient usage requires strong communicative skills and practice, whereas facial expressions and prosody are often spontaneous. Emoticons must be selected from a list and inserted into the text, photos and videos must be taken and uploaded with a certain degree of professionalism. One can certainly speak of a strategy and assume that less experienced or less talented users do not exhaust the actual complexity of the field. However, the impacts on face work are very positive when this happens.



Example 5

5.2. Face work in text and peritext

5.2.1. *Face work in the basic text*

Multicodal face work is diversely present in the posts themselves. It informs the interlocutors about the communicator's intention at the very time a particular message is uttered. Examples 4 and 5 show different codes used for face work. In ex. 5, the communicator uses the photos to reinforce her self face as a pastry chef in this forum. The emphatic politeness of the post, where she explains the circumstances and then seems to offer the cake for online consumption, is supported by the emoticons. In ex. 4, the communicator performs a face-enhancing act (FEA) at the interlocutor Lolian. She is presented as a holder of a coveted property and her successful achievement is attested on her self face ('You post this video and now I also want the pot'). As a result, face work goes both in the direction of the common ground (Lolian is praised for her cooking techniques), and in the direction of the medial processing of the message (Lolian uses the available codes in the forum effectively). The post in ex. 4 is itself masterly with regard to face work. The communicator uses a superficial FTA in the form of an apparent reproach with an appropriate use of emoticons, which is featured as an FEA using paraverbal means. The post as a whole is highly (and positively) marked. We witness here a very complex and efficient form of multicodal face work, which I call "indirect polite". Verbal means of impoliteness² (here in the form of a reproach) are used for an FEA. Multicodality hinders the occurrence of misunderstandings and the potential perception of the utterance as being inappropriate. The response to this post is correspondingly positive.


5.2.2. Face work in the peritext

Face work occurs on online message boards not only in the posted text itself ('basic text' in my terminology) but also in what I call 'peritext' according to Genette (1987). According to Genette, 'paratexts' are texts which flank a basic text and guide the interpretation by giving additional information, for example on the work or the author. Genette distinguishes between peritext and epitext, in which the peritext is connected to the basic text in a material way and "frames" it in direct proximity (e.g. preface and blurb of a novel). The peritext presents and conditions the basic text as the author intended. It can originate from the author himself or from others involved (e.g., the editor). The epitext, in contrast, circulates in spatial and temporal separation from the basic text. However, it is secondary and closely related to the content, mostly through a metatextual reflection (e.g., a book review). The author here is not in control of the kind of presentation.


Posts appear on online message boards not as pure basic texts; rather, they are always framed by the peritext, the profile information of the user. A framing determined by the forum's provider is actually detected there. Usually on the left-hand side, some space can be found for an avatar, a nickname and some information about the activity of the user in the forum. Many forums provide a hierarchy with humorous titles that often rewards long affiliation with the forum or distinct activities. This information is generated by the operator; the users themselves cannot usually influence it. An exception is the number of positive responses on their posts that users may chose to display or not on their profile information in some forums (including Mundorecetas). It is clear that a large number of positive responses has huge face-enhancing value. If, however, no or only a few positive responses are there, the face of the user is potentially threatened, because this implies that the user's contributions are not considered helpful. Therefore,

only particularly successful users of the forum pages usually chose this option. Ex. 6 shows the profile of mary505.

mary505



Subjefa/e de cocina



Registrado: 04 Feb 2004
Mensajes: 4321
Ubicación: aqui en la cocina embadurnada de harina con las manos en la masa, en Estepona (th 21,31,ka,y pani)

Example 6

communicator model that her interlocutors gain when reading her posts. This helps to avoid potential misunderstandings. In the forum, mary505 assumes the role of an expert. All of this helps to prevent her contributions from being rashly classified as inappropriate.

This forum member has uploaded a portrait of herself as an avatar for the peritext. She reveals her first name and place of residence. Thus, she voluntarily steps out of the anonymity of the platform, and interlocutors of her contributions know her name and look her in the eye while reading. She expands the term “ubicación” (‘place’, i.e. of residence) to comply with the common ground of the forum, and stands in the kitchen with flour-covered hands. The platform itself provides more information about her. The forum member has been active in the forum for almost nine years, has contributed thousands of posts and has the second highest rank (subjefa de cocina, ‘sous-chef’, six golden spoons obtained). This information accompanies each individual post that she publishes in the forum, and sharpens the

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Each post is followed by a signature with a motto, a link to a private website or blog, a timeline (How much weight have I lost in the last three months? When is my baby due?) or information about membership of the forum (e.g., the communicator is a member, or even head of the forum group “culo veo culo quiero”, etc.) and sometimes with a mixture of such information, as in ex. 7:



Example 7

In the signature that appears below each of her now almost 3,000 posts, the forum member placed her wishes for the New Year, including a link, a verse and two timelines. We thus learn the following about her: her wishes, the fact that she is a mother and the name of her child and its age. She also left the timeline of the already completed pregnancy in the signature. The profile information also includes hints to the common ground (common preferences, educational background, profile in the forum, geographical origin, age); one shows a part of their life (children and pets, marriage status, occupation) and thus steps out of the anonymity of the online situation. Correspondingly, the interlocutor's model of the communicator sharpens itself and the risk of misunder-

standing the tonality of a post is minimised. The information in the peritext is of great importance for the perception of the information in the basic text. Ex. 8 (below) will illustrate this.

6. Central parameters of a perception-oriented politeness analysis

In section 5, I described the multicodal strategies for face work, using examples from the Spanish-speaking cooking forum *Mundorecetas*, which are typical of communication on online message boards. At the same time, I shifted the focus to those strategies that enhance the face of the communicator and the interlocutor. Communication on online message boards is, however, as initially presented, often considered aggressive. It is therefore assumed that these strategies that make the most of the medial opportunities of online communication do not always achieve their fullest potential. This section is devoted to focusing on less successful communication on online message boards. For this purpose, I will apply a perception-oriented approach, inspired by Watts (2005) and Culpeper (2008).

Interlocutors can classify utterances as appropriate or inappropriate. This manifests itself in the responses to the posts in a thread. The thread structure is particularly beneficial to a perception-oriented analysis because the entire interaction is depicted in the corpus, and thus the perception of utterances is understandable. Perception-oriented politeness approaches, such as Watts', have so far hardly been used in corpus studies because it is usually not easy to capture the reactions of the listener in a corpus for the analysis. Online communication has a huge advantage here, and is very

interesting for research because the entire interaction of all participating parties is presented in verbalised (and digitalised) form.

In perception-oriented approaches, it is assumed that the grade of politeness or impoliteness of utterances can be read in the reactions of the interlocutors. It is assumed that politeness has no absolute linguistic form of realisation, but rather that it is a perceptual phenomenon constructed in discourse (cf. *inter alia* Haugh 2009). The direction of politeness research described by Eelen (2001) as “post-modern” showed that politeness does not necessarily lie in certain linguistic units; rather, it is evaluated and negotiated in the context by the participants. In his model, Watts brought together different characteristics from the politeness / impoliteness field and set them in relation to each other. This is very clear in his diagram (see next page).

Two central criteria that help to explain communication on online message boards can be read from this diagram:

+ / - appropriate → (“(in)appropriate”)

+ / - marked → (“(un)marked”)

Another criterion can be added when one considers Culpeper’s (2008) reception of Watts:

+ / - intentional (“(non)intentional”)

This criterion is present in Watts (2005) but is not applied fully consistently. “Impoliteness,” according to Watts, appears as an oppositional concept to “politeness”; moreover, he speaks of “rudeness” and “overpoliteness”. Culpeper (2008: 28) suggests a consistent consideration of the parameter “intentionality” and establishes the binary oppositions “impoliteness – rudeness” and “mock politeness – overpoliteness”, wherein the first term realises the parameter “intentionality” in each of the two pairs. With this terminology, it is now possible in the field of utterances perceived as inappropriate to constantly distinguish between utterances to

which intentionality is ascribed and utterances classified as being a non-intentional communication failure.

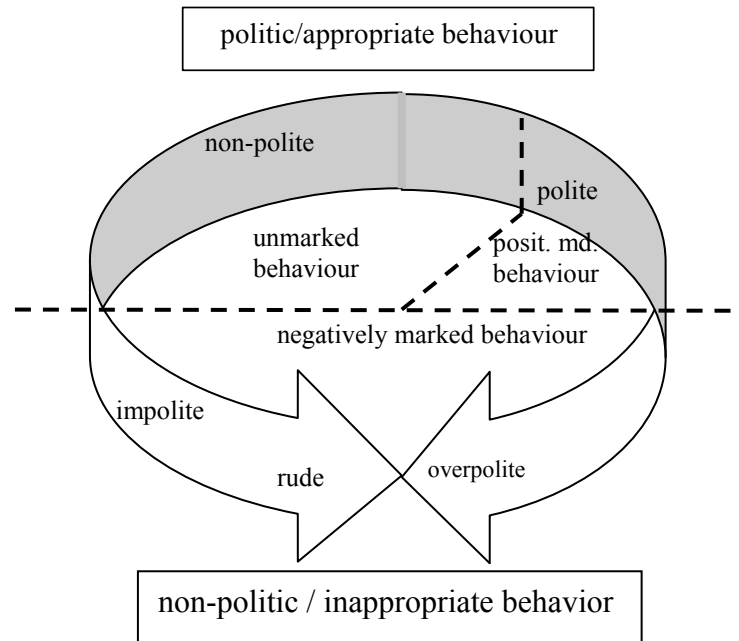


Diagram 2: "Relational work" (Watts 2005: xliii)

The distinction between "impoliteness" and "rudeness" on the one hand and "mock politeness" and "overpoliteness" on the other reveals more possibilities of differentiating: the question of the verbal means implied, whether the propositional act deviates from the illocutionary act, i.e. whether the actual utterance is enriched with typical politeness markers (conjunctive, conditional, indirect questions, modal particles, etc.) and whether this corresponds to the intention of the utterance or whether it is a matter of an indirect speech act. This distinction reflects the fact that utterances that contain verbal politeness markers on the linguistic surface can nevertheless be used to commit FTAs and may be perceived as in-

appropriate (“mock politeness”). Conversely, verbal means of impoliteness² may be used for face-enhancing acts, as we saw in ex. 4 (Lolian’s pressure cooker). I speak in such cases of “indirect politeness”.

This distinction is not made in the “classical” politeness approach of Brown/Levinson. Instead, this approach posits a correspondence between intention and verbal surface, an assumption for which the Brown/Levinson model has often been criticised (inter alia in Eelen’s 2001 outstanding study). The deviation of the verbal level from intention is, just like any other indirect speech act, covered by Grice’s Principle of Cooperation and the Maxims of Conversation: the situation suggests certain conversational strategies which are, however, broken. At the same time, cooperation and a message intention may be assumed. In a given situation, praise, for example, might have been expected, so that the apparent FTA violates the Maxim of Relation. Therefore, the interlocutor concludes that the speech act is probably indirect and perceives it as appropriate. This strategy represents a refraction of the “default strategy” (in the end, a speech act with a polite verbal surface was expected). That is why markedness is achieved in this way. If the speech act is detected to be appropriate, it is shifted from the unmarked “non-polite” area of the model to the one marked appropriate, but with an indirect strategy.

Following Watts (2005), I present diagram 3, taking into account the aforementioned additions, to illustrate the different parameters. The white area encompasses the utterances perceived as unmarked; the shaded areas contain those perceived as marked (whether marked negative or positive). The upper part of the diagram above the straight black line shows those deemed appropriate, while the lower shows utterances perceived as inappropriate.

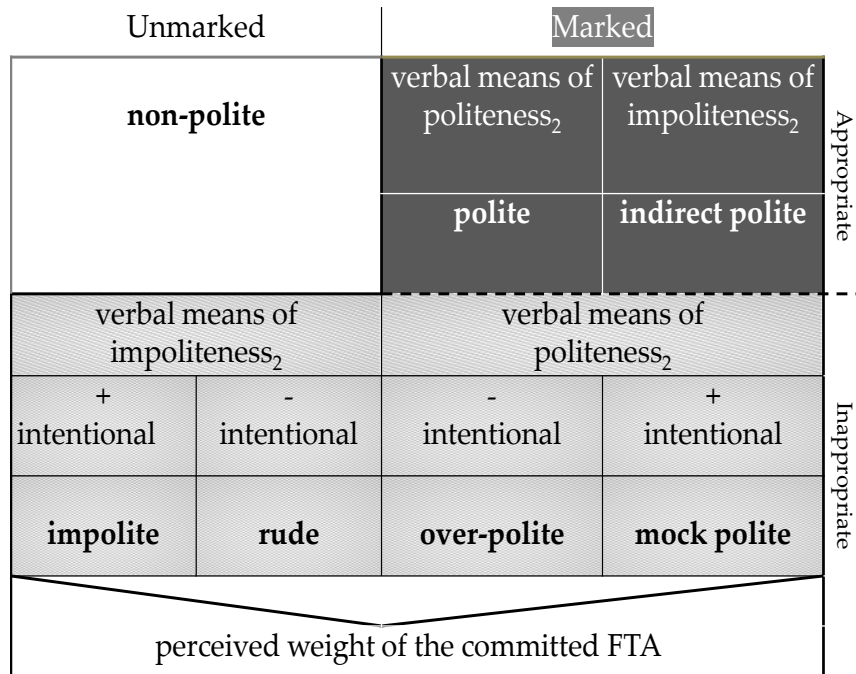


Diagram 3: Parameters for politeness/impoliteness classification

Unmarked utterances are always carried out with the standard means of politeness₂, but marked utterances in the appropriate area can be performed with means of either politeness₂ or impoliteness₂. Below left are utterances considered as inappropriate, marked and made by means of impoliteness₂ (for more on this, see below). Such utterances which are also inappropriate and marked but made by means of politeness₂ are to be placed in the bottom to the right. The criterion of intentionality is also included in the diagram. Intentional utterances are to be located in the lower part towards the outside, unintentional utterances towards the inside. The bottom curve shows that the FTAs committed are considered to be stronger once intentionality is attributed to them.

Many politeness approaches see impoliteness as a complementary concept to politeness, and these are consequently located on the same level. Such an assumption is based on the definition of impoliteness by Bousfield/Locher as “face-aggravating behaviour in a specific context” (2008: 5). Impoliteness functions here as a generic term for a number of face-threatening actions and utterance acts. The model of Watts (2005)/Culpeper (2008) which I modified, on the other hand, contains a proposal to see impoliteness as one of a whole array of inappropriate types of behaviour. Eelen (2001) had already pointed out that politeness and impoliteness are not binary concepts. With the model presented in my diagram, a whole field of possible estimations of utterances opens up, whose reflection is indeed to be seen in the corpus.

In my conception, such terms as “politeness” and “impoliteness” appear at two levels of abstraction: at the level of linguistic means and at the level of the utterance’s assessment by the interlocutors. The latter, as in Eelen (2001), may be classified as a First-Order Phenomenon (lay understanding of politeness), because it is about the way in which linguistic agents classify a speech utterance in a very specific situation in terms of its appropriateness. In order to do that, the interlocutors use intuitive politeness concepts (i.e. politeness₁). The level of classification of linguistic means is, on the other hand, the subject of linguistic studies (scientific understanding of politeness). Modal particles, indirect formulations, certain discourse markers, the conditional, etc. count as typical verbal means of politeness₂. Typical verbal means of impoliteness₂ include conative utterances without mitigation, threats and insults, taboo words and many more. These can be used as an indirect politeness strategy (they are then always marked and suggest communicative closeness). In the very same way, politeness₂ markers can be used for inappropriate communication (in the form of mock politeness or overpoliteness).

Next, I will come to the pairs of opposites (+/- intentional, +/- appropriate, +/- marked) and explain how they help to explain the nature of communication on online message boards.

6.1. Criterion: +/- intentional

In the approach of Locher/Watts (2005), it is not entirely clear how the two terms “impoliteness” and “rudeness” relate to each other, but it seems that “impoliteness” is considered to be a generic term. Culpeper, on the other hand, reserves the term “rudeness” for such cases in which the committing of an FTA was not intended, and he speaks here of “relational mismanagement” (2008: 31). To him, impoliteness is intentional: “a matter of negatively-oriented relational management”. It is based, as Culpeper points out, on a general observation that “hostile and aggressive behaviour” (2008: 32) is rated as being more negative when it is perceived as intentional. This observation is also supported by the findings in the corpus. Therefore, Culpeper’s distinction *impolite* (+ intentional) vs. *rude* (- intentional) makes sense and is accordingly used here, likewise with the pair of opposites *mock polite* (+ intentional) vs. *overpolite* (- intentional). Thus, two terminological binary oppositions can be distinguished in the area of inappropriate communication:

linguistic means	+ intentional	- intentional
Impolite	Impoliteness	Rudeness
Polite	Mock politeness	Overpoliteness

Diagram 4: Inappropriate communication

- Impoliteness is therefore an intentional committing of FTAs with verbal means of impoliteness₂, while rudeness is com-

mitting FTAs with verbal means of impoliteness₂, which is attributed to an inability of well-bred and adequate uttering.

- Mock politeness is thus the intentional committing of FTAs with verbal means of politeness₂, whereas overpoliteness is also performed with the verbal means of politeness₂ but interpreted by the interlocutors as a communicative weakness (Culpeper mentions the example of “too polite” dishonesty, which is negatively rated by the interlocutors).

In negatively marked communication, the intentional committing of FTAs is estimated as a more serious breach than the inability to communicate adequately.

Due to the lack of grounding in the communicative situation in the forum, it is often not clear to the users how to judge a contribution. Is it still OK (politic behaviour) or rude? Or is it even impolite?

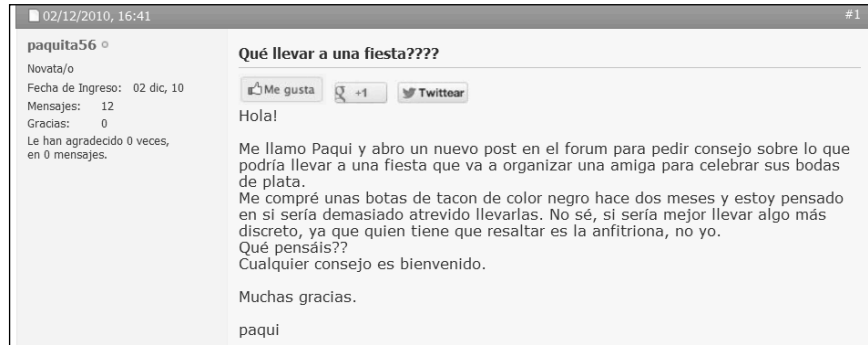
6.2. Criterion: +/- appropriate

According to Watts (2005), behaviour may be perceived as either “appropriate” or “inappropriate”. In his essay of 2003, he refers to appropriate behaviour as “politic behaviour”, which he defines as “behaviour, linguistic and non-linguistic, which the participants construct as being appropriate to the ongoing social interaction” (Watts 2003: 164). He emphasises that the evaluation of an utterance as appropriate or inappropriate is purely personal and can be part of negotiation processes, but is not subject to objective criteria: “The evaluation remains individual and can at best become interpersonal and intersubjective, but can never be objectively verifiable” (Watts 2003: 164). Utterances that do not affect or that even enhance the interlocutor’s face (or that of a third party discussed) are generally perceived as ‘appropriate’. Speech acts that threaten the interlocutor’s face (or a third party discussed) tend to be per-

ceived as 'inappropriate'. The question of whether a post is appropriate or not is repeatedly discussed on online message boards. The lack of grounding in the communicative situation is clearly a major factor: even utterances equipped with verbal means of politeness can be perceived as inappropriate (as "mock polite"), as the additional paraverbal and nonverbal codes available in a face-to-face situation (intonation, facial expressions, gestures) are missing. In a face-to-face situation, those paraverbal and nonverbal markers are added to the verbal politeness markers, so that the intended degree of politeness is not communicated purely verbally. The same verbal utterance accompanied with a smile, classified in a face-to-face situation as unmarked and appropriate, could, in online communication and with the missing extra coding, be evaluated as a deficit and thus classified as inappropriate (i.e. "rude" or "mock polite").

One such example is found in 8. A relatively new member of the forum "*Belleza maquillaje y estética*" ('Beauty, make-up and elegance') on Mundorecetas posts the question of whether it seems appropriate to the interlocutors to wear new black high-heeled boots to her friend's silver wedding, because the hostess should really be the centre of the occasion. The post contains (except for a slightly emphatic punctuation in the headline and in the penultimate sentence) no paraverbal or nonverbal information, neither in the base text nor in the peritext. The peritext is limited to a minimum; other than the (obligatory) nickname and the system-generated data, there is no further information or a signature. Paquita56 has not even yet deactivated the feature that displays how often her contributions were identified as helpful, so a face-threatening value "0" stands in the profile. The grounding in the communicative situation is minimal, because Paquita56 does not give the interlocutors any interpretation guidelines.

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Example 8

Initially, the interlocutors are irritated and commit FTAs against her: Lo_Madhouse, Subjefa de cocina (the second highest rank 'sous-chef') and owner of six spoons in the forum, questions the power of a simple pair of boots:

Tan impresionantes son las botas que van a destacar sobre el resto del mundo?

Example 9

(‘Are these boots so impressive that they will outshine the rest of the world?’) Even Hiphopsus, owner of the highest rank Jefa de cocina (‘head chef’) with 7 spoons, makes fun of her openly – suggesting that the shoes are probably set with diamonds:

XDDD Tendrán diamantes o vete tú a saber



Example 10

Two members give kind answers and make suggestions to the question raised by Paquita56. Obviously, they take the question to be legitimate and appropriate. Another member criticises those


Christiane Maaß

who commented earlier for their unfriendly responses. Lo_Madhouse explains herself: she assumes that Paquita56, who began the thread, in turn makes fun of them. After all, one may wear black boots almost for all occasions:

Es que yo creo que es ella quién nos está tomando el pelo. Desde cuando unas botas negras de tacón son impactantes? Yo, como Yoli, impactaría a diario, sin necesidad de bodorios.

Example 11

This and the following posts show the uncertainty about how the initial post is to be understood. Rociocc (owner of five spoons) expresses even the presumption that Paquita56 could be a troll, because she is apparently new to the forum and began the thread without any further comments from her side:

Pues no sabemos porque no se ha vuelto a pronunciar y era su 2do post así que troll? 

Example 12

(‘And we do not know why she did not come back to explain herself and it was only her second post, so that perhaps troll?’) This judgment is very interesting: Rociocc assumes here that Paquita56’s contribution was mock polite, i.e. an inappropriate, intentional act of disturbing by means of politeness². Therefore, we can state that the judgements shift from “appropriate” (Paquita56 gets a friendly answer) to “rude” (the question is repudiated as nonsense that bothers the other forum members) towards “mock polite” (Paquita56 is a troll!).

It is most likely that Paquita56 was just a novice user who made her first communicative attempts in the forum and logged out after a few miserable failures. In a thread where she immediately becomes a discussed third, she does not even respond. It is interesting that, in the context of her relatively short stay in the forum, she did not acquire the paraverbal and nonverbal codes that are missing even in her previous and subsequent contributions, and thus she received only few kind answers to her posts. Her communication partners had too little information about the common ground and could not create a plausible communicator model. Indeed, over the next six months of her involvement in the forum, Paquita56's communication was a subject of misunderstandings; she was repeatedly discussed as a third party and had to put up with FTAs until she left the forum a few months later.

6.3. Criterion: +/- marked

This analysis also provides insights into the third criterion: the markedness of communication on online message boards.

Any forms of inappropriate communication and cases in which the communicator uses a degree of politeness more than the situation requires are referred to as being marked. Watts describes such utterances as "polite" in the strict sense of the word. My hypothesis is that communication in forums has a tendency to markedness: unmarked utterances run the risk of being classified as inappropriate or becoming the subject of a discussion about their appropriateness. The other users then discuss how certain statements in the thread could be understood (as the example of Paquita56 clearly shows). Such negotiation processes are highly face-threatening. If forum members are directly asked about their intentions, they are forced into a position of self-justification which is face-threatening. But the FTAs become even more serious if forum

members are not directly asked about their intentions, and others negotiate the degree of appropriateness of the utterances that the forum member concerned has made. They thus become the discussed third, the “subject” of a discussion. Through the medial disposition of the message board, they perceive this discussion, and they are discussed about in their own presence. This situation is highly face-threatening, both online and offline (cf. Maaß 2012).

To avoid such a situation, successful communicators tend to give hints to the correct interpretation of their utterances. These hints tend to be multicodal and push their posts out of the unmarked into the marked area of the politeness model presented. Such strategies increase the chance of being perceived as appropriate contributors.

Markedness is associated with affect, and involves positive or negative emotions (cf. Culpeper 2008: 23). In Watts’ approach, the normal degree of politeness that can be expected in a given situation is not considered as ‘polite’ in the narrow sense of the word. It is unmarked, appropriate behaviour that he pointedly calls “non-polite”. Such behaviour, which is frequent in everyday offline communication, tends to be avoided in communication on the successful online message boards of Mundorecetas. Unmarked, ‘non-politic’ behaviour is, according to Watts, acting exactly in the scope of what is to be expected in a given situation. This includes the normal polite manners that are appropriate and are highly dependent on the situation. The scope is given by the scenario (restaurant, meeting friends, family, contacts with authorities, etc.) and by the role of each conversation partner in that scenario.

Situations in which all participants could reliably indicate what is to be expected must be grown historically and provided with clearly defined roles. None of this is the case in online communication. In the online world, there are less standardised situations of

the type “buying bread at the bakery” or “eating out”, which, off-line, are prototypical examples of possible non-polite behaviour.

Furthermore, the intercultural aspect is not to be underestimated. The forum is Spanish-speaking; users come from all parts of the Spanish-speaking world. The base of the expectable is therefore quite small. In addition, the role assignments are often not so clear. In the “buying bread” situation, it is pretty much clear offline who the baker is and who the customer is. On online message boards, roles (such as expert / layperson) are subject to negotiation processes. A stable perception of appropriateness cannot be easily stabilised in open platforms. The example of Paquita⁵⁶ shows that, without grounding in the communicative situation, even the issue of appropriate shoe wearing is susceptible to severe misunderstandings.

What is important here, as we have seen, is paraverbal and non-verbal information of the situational context, of the ongoing scenario, of the roles that the interlocutors play and of the tone of the comments, because they provide us with interpretation aids. Culpeper points out that the “[l]ack of norm ‘sharedness’ may cause communicative difficulty”, where he mainly has in mind the area of “cross-cultural misunderstandings” (2008: 29). ‘Lack of sharedness’, however, can also very concretely refer to information about the current situation, the grounding and the image that the interlocutors have of each other. Here, online communication, through the medial nature of the platforms on which it runs, offers particularly less information. This curtails the range of communicative acts which are easily perceived as “unmarked” and situationally appropriate. Successful communication members compensate for this lack by multicodal face work, which then shifts their contributions into the marked area of the model.

7. Conclusion: Internet communication tends to be marked

Forum communication has developed its own codes, which do not represent a compensation for, nor a projection of, offline communication; rather it has developed its own semiosis. These codes are complex and powerful; they function differently from the facial or gestural codes in offline communication. For example, they must be set explicitly and they do not appear spontaneously for inexperienced users as a mimic expression does. Experienced users can, however, internalise these codes and embed them in their contributions and comments very effectively. This allows them to practise face work that matches the possibilities of an offline situation. With these verbal, paraverbal and nonverbal codes, they create a common ground which leads to making such appropriately equipped forum communication no more prone to aggressive behaviour than that offline. We saw some successful examples of face work on online message boards. These examples show positively marked communication with a well-defined common ground and information for a positively marked communicator model on the part of the interlocutor.

If the user lacks practice and does not embed the codes efficiently, the grounding processes will not work properly. The users then run the risk of their posts being misunderstood and classified as inappropriate. Discussions about the possible intentions of a forum member who is present and reading the comments at his or her expense are highly face-threatening. This is, however, often the case in forum communication, in which communication partners try to figure out the intentions of the less practiced users. Posts without adequate situational grounding trigger aggressive responses. If other forum members then defend the position of the attacked third and commit further FTAs, the discussion in a thread

may degenerate and confirm the existing prejudice against this form of communication.

Hence, communication on online message boards tends to be marked: positively marked in the scope of the 'appropriate behaviour' area of Watt's model and my modification of it (see above), and negatively marked in the scope of 'inappropriate behaviour' area. Markedness can be produced by different strategies. The typical verbal means of politeness and impoliteness can be used with reversed signs to create markedness in an efficient manner. Unmarked communication is risky: insufficient situational grounding may lead the interlocutors to perceive posts as inappropriate. Emphatic communication helps thus to avoid misunderstandings and aggression.

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Negative Evaluation and Face Work in French and Italian Online Comments

1. Introduction

Social Media allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Users can react to this content by commenting or editing it. Leaving a comment is a simple and popular way of participating in the creation of online content, commonly used on social network sites, video-sharing websites, blogs, forums and web portals, among others. Comments are not only used for information exchange, they often also have a social dimension. Positive comments can express approval, sympathy, attention, interest or solidarity with the other. Negative comments, on the other hand, can be perceived as face-threatening and therefore tend to be mitigated in order to be socially acceptable. The aim of this paper is to examine how negative comments are produced in online communities, namely in French and Italian cooking recipe portals. Cooking portals have become very popular during the last few years and are used by millions of people to find, share and comment on cooking recipes of all kind. By commenting on other recipes users want to share their experience, help other users and express themselves as a member of the community. Online communities of that kind are therefore marked by solidarity and cooperation. A great majority of the user's comments contain positive evaluations such as compliments, appreciation, praise, signals of cooperation or

expression of gratitude. Part of the comments, however, also includes critical remarks. The study will analyse how negative evaluations are realised within the specific context of an online community. Which strategies and specific linguistic devices are used to express negative evaluations and to what extent are they based on face considerations? Are there regularities in the use of face-related strategies which can be identified within all or most of the comments? And, finally, are some of the strategies specific to electronic discourse as used in online portals? The study is based on a corpus of 700 online comments drawn from two popular cooking recipe portals in French and Italian.

2. Negative evaluation and face concerns

Negative evaluations in online comments include expressions of disapproval, criticism and disagreement, all of them being potentially face-threatening acts. More precisely, they can be described as acts that threaten the addressee's positive face want, by indicating that the speaker has a negative evaluation of some aspect of the hearer's positive face (Brown/Levinson 1987: 66). The speakers convey in their comments that they do not like, at least to some extent, what the addressee has posted and thereby do not satisfy his positive face want, i.e., his desire to be liked, appreciated, and ratified by others. In this view, negative evaluations need to be mitigated in order to be socially acceptable. They need to be accompanied by specific linguistic strategies or devices which have been described within politeness theories, among others. Brown and Levinson (1987: 112-117) include "Seek agreement" and "Avoid disagreement" in their strategies of positive politeness. The strategy of avoiding disagreement includes patterns such as token agreement, pseudo-agreement, white lies and hedging

opinions. Leech (1983: 132) includes an “Agreement Maxim” and an “Approbation Maxim” in the six maxims of his Politeness Principle. The first one includes the sub-maxim “Minimize disagreement between self and other”, the second one the sub-maxim “Minimize dispraise of other”. Both of them seem to be pertinent to the description of negative evaluations as those given in online comments within an online community.

In terms of conversation analysis, disagreements are typically understood as dispreferred second pair parts (Sacks 1973/1987; Pomerantz 1984). As such, they are likely to be prefaced, softened and delayed (e.g., by hesitations or requests for clarification) in contrast to preferred (unmarked) actions. However, disagreement does not always have to be dispreferred and perceived as face-threatening (Angouri/Locher 2012). In certain contexts, it can simply be a product of contextual requirements (e.g., Georgakopoulou 2001; Hernández-Flores 2008; Angouri 2012) or even a sign of intimacy and sociability (e.g., Schiffrin 1984; Tannen/Kakavá 1992; Sifianou 2012). The latter could be called constructive disagreement (Sifianou 2012), referring to disagreement that is perceived as positive and helps to strengthen the participants’ relationships rather than to destroy them. “Besides being an exclusively face-threatening act, disagreement may serve face-enhancing functions if it is intended to display interest in the other. In other words, disagreement may indicate the addressee’s interest through their involvement in interaction rather than indifference” (Sifianou 2012: 1560). This face-enhancing function of disagreement might be particularly interesting for the analysis of online comments as considered in this paper. Disagreement or negative evaluation can be beneficial to other members of the online community in that it helps to improve the recipes. The study will try to explore the specific role of face work within disagreement, disapproval and criticism in online comments.

3. Data

The study is based on 700 online comments drawn from two popular cooking recipe portals in French and Italian, namely Marmiton (hosted in France) and Giallo Zafferano (hosted in Italy).¹ The portals provide recipes of all kind, illustrated with photographs and sometimes videos. The users can react to each recipe by leaving a comment and, in the case of Marmiton, by rating it on a scale up to 5. The comments appear below the recipe and can be read by all the users. Apart from recipes and comments the portals offer a number of associated services such as discussion forums, blogs, cooking instructions, articles and a search engine for the recipes. The study analyses comments to recipes for traditional French and Italian desserts which have been posted between January 2011 and January 2012. 44% of the French comments and 34% of the Italian comments include a negative evaluation of the commented recipe which appears at least in part of the comment. The study will focus on the linguistic realisation of these negative evaluations and will examine how face work is done in this context. Personal data like the names of the users have been removed.

4. The macrostructure of negative comments

Critical, disagreeing or disapproving remarks are expressed in various forms in the comments. In rare cases they are expressed in a direct and unmitigated way, like in example (1). The negative evaluation is given in a short message by indicating that certain

¹ They appear to be the most popular cooking recipe portals in French and Italian with more than 350.000 pageviews per day for Marmiton and more than 274.000 pageviews per day for Giallo Zafferano (Freewebsitereport 2013).

parts of the recipe are wrong or that the resulting dish is not how it was expected to be. In most of the comments, however, the negative evaluation is mitigated by modifying it or by adding certain elements, like in example (2). This makes the comments longer, friendlier and more acceptable for the addressee in terms of positive face.

(1) [Mousse au chocolat]

Cette mousse n'a pas grand-chose d'une mousse, sa consistance est beaucoup trop épaisse.

This mousse isn't very mousse-like, the consistency is much too thick.

(2) [Tarte au citron meringuée]

Très très bon ! Par contre j'ai doublé les proportions pour les meringues, sinon ça faisait vraiment trop peu.. Biscuit très bon, on sent bien le beurre. Et crème très bonne aussi.

Very very tasty! But I have doubled the proportions for the meringues, otherwise it was really too little.. Very nice biscuit, you can really taste the butter. And the cream is also very tasty.

The positive effect on the addressee's face can be achieved by various strategies. The critical remark in (2) is expressed in an indirect way (*I have doubled the proportions instead of the indicated proportions are wrong*) and is preceded and followed by approving remarks (*Very very tasty! The biscuit is very nice, you can really taste the butter, etc.*). A tripartite structure of that kind (approval – disapproval – approval) is very common within the comments. A systematic analysis of macrostructural features of negative comments reveals that there are three main strategies used to mitigate negative evaluations, namely (1) Giving agreement before disagreeing, (2) Giving reasons and explanations and (3) Pointing to subjectivity. As shown in Table 1, all of these strategies are frequently used in the comments.

	French comments	Italian comments
Giving agreement before disagreeing	88%	77%
Giving reasons and explanations	49%	54%
Pointing to subjectivity	63%	64%

Table 1. Macrostructural features and their occurrence in the comments²

4.1. Giving agreement before disagreeing

The most frequently used strategy of mitigation in the comments is the one of agreeing before disagreeing. The user starts by agreeing with or by approving what has been presented in the recipe before addressing disagreement. In conversation analysis *partial* or *token agreement* has been associated with the preference structure of the discourse, as the dispreferred response is delayed by a prefaced agreement. Responses of the type “yes, but...” have proved to be a common way of expressing disagreement in oral discourse (Pomerantz 1984; Mulkay 1985; Kotthoff 1993; Kuo 1994; Holtgraves 1997, among others). Similar patterns have been observed in written communication, not only for disagreement but also for other forms of negative evaluation such as criticism or refusal. Mulkay (1985) has analysed disagreements in letters and found that almost two thirds of the expressed disagreements are prefaced by some kind of agreement. Johnson (1992) and Johnson/Roen (1992) have examined the use of compliments as a strategy to mitigate face-threatening acts in peer review texts written in an academic setting. They have shown that compliments are often used in the opening sections of peer review texts to establish and maintain solidarity before giving criticism in the

² The percentages refer to the ratio of the number of negative comments in which the respective strategies are used to the total number of negative comments.

subsequent sections (cf. also Hyland 2004). Similarly, refusal letters have been proved to contain expressions of praise and appreciation of the candidate before (or after) informing the candidate of the refusal of his application (Jablin/Krone 1984; Manno 1999). Strategies like these are directed to the addressee's positive face as a reaction to the face-threatening effect produced by disagreement, criticism or refusal.

The same kind of strategy can be observed within the online comments. 88% of the critical comments in the French corpus and 77% of the critical comments in the Italian corpus include positive evaluations. The positive evaluation is usually given at the beginning of the message, often in terms of a compliment (examples 3-6). The negative evaluation is given after the compliment and in many cases followed by another compliment (examples 4-5).

(3) [Tarte au citron meringuée]

Fabuleuse ! 2 citrons suffisent et à si basse température ma meringue n'a jamais "doré": à essayer à four un peu plus chaud.

Fabulous! 2 lemons are enough and at such a low temperature my meringue never got golden: try turning up the oven temperature a little bit.

(4) [Tarte au citron meringuée]

Superbe recette sauf la meringue qui ne durcit pas. J'ajoute un sachet de sucre vanillé en enlevant un peu de sucre, et la recette remporte tous les suffrages !!

Brilliant recipe except that the meringue does not harden. I add a packet of vanilla sugar and remove some of the regular sugar, and the recipe is very well received!!

(5) [Crostata con mascarpone e gocce di cioccolato]

ciao, ho fatto ieri sera la crostata, molto buona, anche se per me forse un po' troppo dolce.. ma deliziosa!!!!

hi, I made the Crostata yesterday, very nice, even if it's a bit too sweet for me... but delicious!!!!

(6) [Torta caprese]

Ciao, la torta caprese è venuta buonissima...pero' non riesco a capire come mai la parte superiore ogni volta che tagliavo una fetta si distruggeva un po'...dove ho sbagliato??

Hi, the caprese cake turned out really well...but I can't understand why the upper part breaks whenever I cut off a piece... where did I make a mistake??

The examples show that the compliments tend to be exaggerated (*fabuleuse, superbe recette, deliziosa, buonissima*) and emphasised by the use of (repeated) exclamation marks whereas the negative evaluations tend to be mitigated. In Brown and Levinson's terms (1987: 112-117) the strategies "Exaggerate agreement" and "Avoid disagreement" appear to be closely connected. The successful combination of both is a means to express a negative evaluation without threatening the addressee's face and, at the same time, reaffirm solidarity and cooperation within the online community. Even if the critical remarks are sometimes quite strong (the ingredients are wrong, the topping does not dry, the cake breaks, etc.), the overall impression of the comment is the one of a friendly, appreciating statement clearly directed to the addressee's positive face.

4.2. Giving reasons and explanations

Another frequent strategy is the one of giving reasons or explanations for the disapproval, criticism or disagreement. The comment is made more acceptable by pointing out that there is a good reason for giving a negative evaluation. A similar strategy can be observed for the expression of disagreement in oral discourse when a speaker gives reasons for disagreeing (e.g., Pearson 1986; Locher 2004), or in written communication when refusal letters are mitigated by mentioning explicit reasons for the refusal (e.g., Jablin/Krone 1984; Manno 1999). Jansen/Janssen (2010) have tested the

effectiveness of positive politeness strategies in bad news letters and have found that giving reasons clearly has a positive effect on the evaluation of the letters.

Within the corpus about half of the critical comments (49% for the French and 54% for the Italian corpus) try to justify their negative evaluation by giving a reason or an explanation. In many cases the justification consists of an appeal to authority, to tradition or to a majority. The opinion of an authority figure is used to support the user's own opinion on the recipe (appeal to authority). Instead of giving a real argument, the critical remark is justified by referring to the opinion of a professional cook (examples 7 and 8).

- (7) Mio papà, cuoco per professione e passione, afferma che secondo lui 1l di latte è troppo e quindi la crema non si addensa a sufficienza e rispetto alla pasta frolla è eccessiva.

My dad, a professional chef who also cooks for the love of it, confirms that in his opinion 1l of milk is too much and hence the cream does not thicken sufficiently and in proportion to the shortcrust pastry it is too much.

- (8) Je l'ai fait aujourd'hui pour mon mari ancien boulanger pâtissier qui raffole de la tarte au citron. Il l'a trouvée bonne mais pour la pâte il conseille plutôt une pâte sablée.

I made it for my husband today, a former pastry-chef who is crazy about lemon tart. He found it fine but for the pastry he recommends shortcrust pastry instead.

The user's opinion can also be supported by appealing to tradition, for example by saying that the recipe does not respect the traditional way of cooking, or by appealing to the opinion of a majority, by saying that *the whole family, all of the guests or most of the other users* share the expressed opinion. All of these arguments are implicitly directed to the addressee's positive face. The author insinuates that it is not his intention to disregard the addressee's positive face want, but that there are other reasons for him to disagree with the recipe. He resorts to an external authority and

hence avoids committing himself to the potentially face-threatening statement. He thereby protects both the addressee's and his own positive face.

4.3. Pointing to subjectivity

The critical remark can be mitigated by stressing the author's subjectivity, i.e., by making clear that the speaker expresses his subjective opinion. The issue is described as being a personal problem rather than a mistake in the recipe. To point to the subjectivity of a negative evaluation protects both the speaker's and the addressee's face (Locher 2004: 127). The speaker's face is protected because a subjective statement referring to his personal experience cannot be easily disputed. More importantly it also concerns the addressee's face as it makes clear that the speaker's intention is to respect the addressee and his desire to be understood, ratified and appreciated (positive face want). 63% of the negative comments in French and 64% of the negative comments in Italian include elements stressing the subjectivity of the expressed opinion. The problem is presented as being the result of a personal impression (example 9), of personal preferences (example 10), or of the user's personal incapacity (example 11).

- (9) Il sapore era ottimo. Ho avuto l'impressione, però, che fosse un po' troppo densa, più simile ad un budino.

The taste was superb. I still had the impression that it was a bit too thick, more like a pudding.

- (10) Per gusto personale (e di mia mamma) la prossima volta metterò un po' meno zucchero.

For personal taste (and my mum agrees) I would use a bit less sugar next time.

- (11) Tarte tout simplement excellente. Dommage que je n'arrive jamais à obtenir une meringue croquante. à faire et à refaire !

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Simply excellent cake. It's a pity that I never manage to get a crispy meringue. To be made again and again!

In other cases the problem is described in an indirect way by telling how the speaker has modified the recipe (*ho raddoppiato le dosi* (I doubled the doses)), how he will modify it (*la prossima volta farò più crema* (next time I will make more cream)), would modify it (*aggiungerei qualche aroma* (I would add some flavor)) or would have modified it (*forse ci avrei messo un pò di mascarpone in meno* (maybe I would have used a bit less mascarpone)). Subjectivity is introduced by the use of the first person singular which helps the speaker to avoid an explicit statement about the recipe or the person having posted it. Nearly all the comments of that kind (with very few exceptions) also include compliments so that the overall impression is a friendly and positive one. The strategy of giving compliments before disagreeing and of introducing disagreement through the expression of subjectivity appears to be a very effective kind of face work in the given context of online comments.

5. Microstructural features of negative comments

At a microstructural level a number of specific linguistic devices are used to mitigate negative remarks within the comments. Positive effects on the addressee's face are achieved not only by the use of general strategies like the ones mentioned in section 4, but also by quite specific linguistic forms which appear to be employed within these strategies. Some of them are listed in Table 2 and will be briefly discussed in this section. The mitigating function of these devices is not inherent to their linguistic form, but evolves from their specific use within the given context. Most but not all of

them have also been described within politeness theory (e.g., Brown/Levinson 1987) and within research on mitigation (e.g., Caffi 2007).

	Examples	FR	IT
Understaters and diminutives	fatti ieri. Venuti buonissimi, solo 1 po' duretti... <i>made them yesterday. They turned out really well, only a bit too hard...</i>	32%	37%
Suspension dots	buonissimo..... ho avuto solo un piccolo problemino!!!! al momento di stendere la pasta frolla [...] <i>really good..... I had only one little problem!!!! at the moment of rolling out the shortpastry [...]</i>	11%	27%
Emoticons	Ho provato a dimezzare la dose e viene molto più buona! 😊 <i>I tried to halve the ingredients and it turned out much better! 😊</i>	0%	14%
Conditional mood	E se aggiungessi alla ricetta anche mezza bustina di lievito in polvere? <i>And if you added half a sachet of baking powder to the recipe?</i>	8%	10%
Rhetorical questions	io l'ho tenuta dentro un'ora e mezza e avrebbe avuto bisogno di ancora un po' di tempo! Causa del mio forno? Chissà! <i>I kept it in the oven one hour and a half and it could have done with some more time! Was it my oven's fault? Who knows!</i>	1%	13%

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Expression of regret	Peccato per il caramello che NON mi è uscito ma questo semifreddo è uno spettacolo anche da solo. <i>Pity about the caramel that DIDN'T work out for me but this semifreddo is also a spectacle on its own.</i>	5%	9%
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Table 2. Mitigating devices and their occurrence in the comments³

5.1. Understaters and diminutives

Understaters and diminutives are among the most frequently used mitigation devices within the comments. Many of the critical remarks contain elements, mostly adverbial modifiers, which underrepresent the described problem. The cream could be *a little bit* lighter (*un pochettino più leggera*). Twelve eggs seem to be *a bit* too much (*mi sembrano un pò tantine*). The cake is wonderful, there is *only one little* problem (*c'è solo un piccolo problemino*), etc. Especially in Italian the users frequently use diminutive forms to downgrade the dimension of the problem and hence to protect the addressee's face. By understating the state of affairs which is the reason for the negative evaluation the speaker implicitly expresses his desire to satisfy the addressee's face want. Even if there is a problem in the recipe and the author wants to point it out, he also wants to demonstrate solidarity with the addressee as a member of the online community. He wants to show him by the use of certain linguistic strategies that he appreciates his contribution and does not want to offend him.

³ The percentages refer to the ratio of the number of negative comments in which the respective devices are used to the total number of negative comments.

5.2. Suspension dots

One of the striking features of mitigation in the comments is the use of suspension dots. It can be observed that critical remarks are often preceded by three or more dots which seems to be a symbolic means of delaying the dispreferred part of the message. This reminds us of hesitations or pauses preceding dispreferred second pair parts in oral discourse (Sacks 1973/1987). The delay indicates the dispreferred character of the following message or, in terms of face theory, the potentially face-threatening content which needs to be mitigated. Suspension dots are a simple way to display hesitation in written communication. They seem to be used quite systematically in some of the comments. However, they are not only used to delay critical comments but also for other purposes such as separating two pieces of information or indicating the incomplete character of the message. Some of the users employ them quite extensively which makes it difficult to define their specific function.

5.3. Emoticons

Emoticons are commonly used in different types of digitally mediated communication such as text messages, online chats or private e-mails. They can serve a variety of functions (cf., e.g., Marcoccia/Gauducheau 2007) and are usually employed in informal contexts. Only some of the online comments, especially in the Italian corpus, contain emoticons.⁴ One of their functions is to accompany negative evaluations in order to stress the friendly intention of the message and thereby soften its face-threatening character. The smiling or winking face represented by the emoticon can be understood as

⁴ Emoticons are rarely used in the French comments. The difference between the two languages might be due to different conventions in the respective portals.

indicating the author's desire not to offend the addressee with his message and to satisfy his want for appreciation and positive evaluation. In some cases emoticons also give a playful or humorous touch to the message, especially in the case of tongue sticking smileys. Humour can be used as a means to indicate a friendly relationship among the members of the online community. It can also indicate that the critical remark is not to be taken seriously in terms of a face-threatening act.

5.4. Conditional mood

The conditional mood is used as an indirect way of criticising certain ingredients or elements of the recipe. Using the respective grammatical forms (*conditionnel* in French, *condizionale* in Italian) the matter is presented as a hypothetical state of affairs and therefore not meant to threaten the addressee's face. *E se aggiungessi alla ricetta anche mezza bustina di lievito in polvere?* (*And if you added half a sachet of baking powder to the recipe?*) appears to be a suggestion rather than a criticism or an accusation that the baking powder is missing. It gives the addressee the option to ignore the remark and not to see it as a negative evaluation of what he has posted. In other cases the conditional mood is used to express suggestions in the first person singular when the speaker tells what he would do (*je mettrais que 100g de beurre* (*I would use only 100g of butter*)) instead of what the recipe suggests to do. Again this is an indirect way of telling what is wrong with the recipe without directly addressing the person who has posted it.

5.5. Rhetorical questions

Rhetorical questions are another means of mitigating the face-threatening character of critical remarks. They are mainly used in

the Italian comments and appear only in very few of the French comments.⁵ Rhetorical questions are used for two purposes. They either refer to possible reasons for the described problem (*Causa del mio forno? Chissà! (Was it my oven's fault? Who knows!)*) or are used for an indirect expression of suggestions (*Non è che magari un pò di lievito ci va? (Maybe it might need some yeast?)*). In the first case the negative evaluation of the recipe is partly cancelled by considering a reason which is external to the recipe and its author. In contrast to other occurrences of the strategy of giving reasons (see section 4) the reason is not asserted, but simply presumed as one of the possible reasons for the problem. This helps to minimise the imposition on the addressee. The second case is similar to the use of conditional mood in that it is a conventionally indirect way of telling what is wrong. The rhetorical question makes a suggestion how to improve the recipe but provides a maximum of freedom whether to accept the suggestion or not. In both cases the author's intention is not to impose his opinion and, at the same time, to show interest to the addressee and his recipe.

5.6. Expressing regret

Another strategy of mitigation is the expression of regret before or after giving a critical comment. This can be done by regretting explicitly that something has gone wrong (*Peccato per il caramello che NON mi è uscito (Pity about the caramel that DIDN'T work out for me)*) or by excusing for the critical comment (*Note peut-être un peu sévère mais je ne les ai pas trouvées 'délicieuses' ! Désolée ! (This rating might*

⁵ The difference is probably due to different communicative conventions on the two portals. It is common to include questions for clarification in the comments of the Italian portal, whereas it is quite rare in the comments of the French portal. The convention of asking questions for clarification might facilitate the use of rhetorical questions on the Italian portal.

be a bit harsh, but I didn't think they were 'delicious'! Sorry!)). The use of politeness formula (*désolé(e)* (sorry), *scusa/scusate* (excuse me)) expresses respect for the addressee even if the author does not agree with what he has posted. He apologises for his disagreement and thereby indicates that it is not his intention to disregard the addressee's face wants.

6. Conclusion

The study has shown that face work is done in various ways within the negative comments. Three main strategies have been identified as means to modify the critical or disapproving content of the comments, namely the strategies of agreeing before disagreeing, of giving reasons and explications and of pointing to subjectivity. Nearly all of the comments, with very few exceptions, make use of one or more of these strategies. Face considerations play an important role as a means to mitigate the potential face-threatening character of negative comments and to make them more acceptable for the addressee, but also as a means to express approval, interest and solidarity with the addressee as a member of the online community. Both aspects are intertwined and can hardly be separated in the analysis of face work in the specific context of online communities. At a microstructural level face work relies on a variety of linguistic devices. Unlike the three major strategies which are used quite systematically and could be described as regularities, the choice of the specific linguistic devices seems to be a matter of individual preferences rather than of regularities. Their usage differs among individuals, but also between the French and the Italian comments. Some of the identified devices are specific to electronic discourse, namely the use of suspension dots and of emoticons. The overall strategies, however,

are not substantially different from social interaction in other communicative contexts and can be described as general patterns of face work in social interaction.

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Face Work and Flaming in Social Media

1. Introduction

Social Media¹ play an increasingly important part in face work or relational management² of individuals as well as of groups.³ Based on a case study from YouTube, this paper deals with the linguistic analysis of flaming within the framework of pragmatics. Flaming is regarded as a particular means of face work practised in Social Media. Until now flaming has merely been described from a sociological or psychological perspective,⁴ according to which this phenomenon owes its rise to the Social Media.⁵ The term *flaming* is supposed to have first been created by the community itself in the

¹ According to Kietzmann et al. 2011, who concentrate on the economic impact for business firms, Social Media may serve seven different functions, i.e. identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups. Similarly, Richter/Koch 2008 define the following functions: identity management, search (for experts), context awareness and management, network awareness, exchange/communication.

² Cf. the theory of relational management based on Goffman 1955 and applied for linguistic purposes by Spencer-Oatey 2000 and 2007, Locher/Watts 2005, Fant 2007. For a more detailed account see Locher 2012, Held 2011, Thaler 2011, amongst others.

³ The concept of *groups* includes cognitively defined virtual social groups as in computer-mediated communication (CMC).

⁴ E.g. Lea et al. 1992, Kitchens 1998, O'Sullivan/Flanagin 2003, Alonzo/Aiken 2004, Moor et al. 2010, Nitin et al. 2011.

⁵ Before, the "hostile expression of strong emotions and feelings" was "relatively uncommon in CMC, but [...] frequently remarked upon", as Lea et al. 1992: 89 point out in one of the earliest articles on flaming.

1980s and to have undergone a change of meaning since then.⁶ Currently flaming denotes an improper, impertinent, provocative or aggressive contribution to any kind of internet forum, chat or other electronic communication platform. Alonzo/Aiken indicate that “the term generally requires hostile intentions characterised by words of profanity, obscenity, and insults that inflict harm to a person or an organisation resulting from uninhibited behavior” (2004: 205). In their study about users’ attitudes towards flaming with special regard to YouTube, Moor et al. define the overall function of flaming as “displaying hostility by insulting, swearing or using otherwise offensive language” (2010: 1536).

Among Social Media, YouTube is usually seen as a Web 2.0 content community platform offering media, livecasting and video sharing for the purpose of entertainment.⁷ Less well-known perhaps is its function as an interactive medium of communication: users who have seen a video or listened to an audio clip uploaded by others are invited to leave their comments, which may call forth other comments in reaction, so that a kind of virtual conversation may develop. These comments, which nowadays occupy quite a prominent position within the platform, range from appraisal to bewilderment or even offence. Although in its Community Guide-

⁶ Moor et al. 2010: 1536 date back the first occurrence of the term to Steele’s et al. *The Hacker’s Dictionary* of 1983, where the original definition was ‘to speak rabidly and/or incessantly on an uninteresting topic or with a patently ridiculous attitude.’ – As noted at the same time in the 1983 edition of the *Oxford Concise Dictionary* (s.v.), the term *flaming*, derived from the English verb *to flame* in the figurative sense of ‘to burst out into anger’, may refer to a variety of meanings, amongst which the archaic sense of ‘exaggerated, over-laudatory’ alludes to the irony involved and the colloquial sense of ‘passionate’ refers to the overall mode of expression.

⁷ Cf. YouTube’s self-description (YouTube n.d.b): “Founded in February 2005, YouTube allows billions of people to discover, watch and share originally created videos. YouTube provides a forum for people to connect, inform and inspire others across the globe and acts as a distribution platform for original-content creators and advertisers, large and small.”

lines the platform makes some general restrictions⁸ providing sanctions against inappropriate comments, which may be removed or reported as spam, or its users may be blocked, nevertheless the extent of provocative, scoffing or even offensive comments with respect to contents offered by others that are allowed to pass without sanctions is quite astonishing. It is therefore legitimate to question the above-cited prevalent function of flaming as “displaying hostility” and to propose another framework capable of differentiating between the various underlying intentions and effects of flaming.

Within the framework of (im-)politeness and relational management theories, flaming could be considered as a face-threatening act (FTA) *par excellence* to be avoided at all costs for the sake of successful everyday communication.⁹ Whether or not the flamed person or target is absent from interaction, there are contexts and communities of practice¹⁰ that not only allow but even encourage flaming.¹¹ But the awareness and perception of flaming as FTA

⁸ Community Guidelines’ formulations are identical worldwide: “We encourage free speech and defend everyone’s right to express unpopular points of view. But we do not permit hate speech (speech which attacks or demeans a group based on race or ethnic origin, religion, disability, gender, age, veteran status and sexual orientation/gender identity). There is zero tolerance of predatory behaviour, stalking, threats, harassment, invading privacy or the revealing of other members’ personal information. Anyone caught doing these things may be permanently banned from YouTube.” (YouTube n.d.c).

⁹ In terms of Brown/Levinson 1987: 1, communication is destined “to minimise the imposition on the addressee arising from a verbal act and the consequent possibility of committing a face-threatening act.” For a critique of the compensatory effect of politeness in interaction see Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2004 and 2011 and recent research on impoliteness, e.g. Culpeper 1996, 2005 and 2011, Bousfield 2008 and 2010, Bousfield/Locher 2008, Locher 2010 and 2012, amongst others.

¹⁰ Cf. Wenger 1998.

¹¹ Besides advertising (e.g. Alcaide Lara 2010; Fuentes Rodríguez/Alcaide Lara 2008), television shows (e.g. Culpeper 2005; Fuentes Rodríguez 2013) and political debates (e.g. Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2011; Helfrich 2011), CMC seems to provide a particularly fruitful context for provocative FTAs of this type.

may vary according to context features like the degree of directness of communication, the degree of publicity and mediatisation. An overtly impolite,¹² apparently face-threatening act such as flaming may therefore not even always serve its prototypic function, that of attacking a person's integrity. I will argue for a linguistic analysis of face work and flaming that takes into account the interplay of context-specific¹³ structural, semantic, semiotic, pragmatic, ethnological, multiconal and multimodal phenomena and norms of communication on the various interactional levels of Social Media.¹⁴

2. Data and Analysis

The following analysis is based on comments made on a 6'10" audio clip from a popular Chilean phone-in radio show called *El chacotero sentimental*, in which members of the audience talk to the presenter about their romantic and sexual experiences. This programme, presented daily by Roberto Artiguitía from 1996 until 2000, and re-started in 2006,¹⁵ has attained cult status in Chile. The real protagonist of the show is its popular presenter, known also by his nickname El Rumpy, whose intention is to make fun of

¹² Following Culpeper's definition, impoliteness is necessarily bound to intentionality: "Impoliteness comes about when: (1) the speaker communicates face-attack intentionally, or (2) the hearer perceives and/or constructs behaviour as intentionally face-attacking, or a combination of (1) and (2)" (2005: 38).

¹³ Cf. Terkourafi 2005; Locher/Watts 2005; Locher 2011.

¹⁴ For similar approaches of CMC in general see Androutsopoulos 2010 and Herring 2013.

¹⁵ Until 2000 on Rock&Pop-Channel, daily from 2.30 pm, and since 2006 on Radio Corazón FM, Monday to Saturday from 2pm to 4 pm. In view of its popularity various films were produced celebrating the programme and its presenter: *El Chacotero Sentimental* (Chile 1999, director: Cristián Galaz), *Radio Corazón* (Chile 2007, director: Roberto Artiguitía), *Grado 3* (Chile 2009, director: Cristián Galaz). There are numerous clips starring El Rumpy or the radio show on YouTube.

incoming callers in line with the programme's title ('the sentimental teaser'). In this clip, the caller is a young woman aged 22 (María), mother of a 3-year-old girl, who is still attending school as a result of having had to repeat several classes. The conversation between the two is about María's amorous relationship to one of her teachers despite living in a steady relationship with someone else. For obvious reasons she is introduced by El Rumpy under the pseudonym *María*. Although María repeatedly tries to draw his attention to her romantic story, El Rumpy from the beginning takes every opportunity to mock her for failures of school and to score points off her brutally, e.g. by subjecting her to 'examination questions' that she cannot answer and where she makes a complete fool of herself. The clip culminates in the apparently simple but – for the confused María – unanswerable question, *¿Quién descubrió América?*¹⁶

This clip, which was uploaded on YouTube by user ChIsPa2804 on 5th January, 2009,¹⁷ had been accessed 76.912 times by 15th April 2013. It received 111 comments and 9 channel comments.¹⁸ Its contents aim to provoke reactions of malicious glee, and the clip still seems to attract users even after having been online for more than four years. Analysis will focus on the different strategies and targets of flaming in this sample and ask for the functions of flaming as face work within this type of social medium.

¹⁶ For a linguistic analysis of this clip see Helfrich 2013.

¹⁷ Cf. YouTube 2009 and YouTube n.d.a. In the Spanish-speaking countries Chile and Spain in question, YouTube is 3rd in popularity after Facebook and Twitter (33,1%, Chile) and 2nd after Facebook (64%, Spain), respectively.

¹⁸ Total including blocked comments.

2.1. Flaming the target

Most comments refer specifically to the actors on the audio clip, i.e. the presenter Rumpy and his conversation partner María, hence constructing their respective faces. Comments aimed at María as target predominate¹⁹ and, typically of FTAs, flame her stupidity, whereas comments that express pity for María or try to defend her are very rare.²⁰ Commentators' behaviour in the apparently non-hierarchical world of the Social Media can indeed be compared to the so-called *schooling* or *flocking behaviour* of animals:²¹ In this example the tenor of flaming is introduced by ChIsPa2804, the user who uploaded this contents on YouTube under the suggestive title *El Rumpy (weona tonta)* and who also

¹⁹ Comments on target María amount to 70 out of 111, whilst only 14 comments refer to El Rumpy alone, 11 on both, 10 on others, and 5 comments have unspecified reference. Note that there is only comment on uploader ChIsPa2804 (9 comments addressed to ChIsPa2804 are published in the separate section of channel comments, see below p. 307f.). As a rule, commentators intervene only once, at least under the same alias (92 comments). If a commentator leaves more than one comment, this appears either as answer to other comments and may open out in interaction between commentators (cf. below p. 310f.), or else is posted like a sort of addendum immediately after the first comment, as if the latter had not yet been completed, e.g. comments (110) *jajajajajaaj pobre y triste...* and (109), *puta la weona pava*, both by Valentina Gorgonita, comments (103) *weona tonta won...no pudiste ponerle mejor titulo!!!* and (102), *puntaje poblacional psu..pensará esta wea o no??*, both by Emerson Galvez, and comments (40) *puta la weona tonta* and (39) *jajajajajaja el rumpy la mando a la xuxa ajajajajaja por ser tan weona*, both by gu4r1. There is only one case of multiple participation in regular yearly intervals (with a slightly changed alias):

(74) sociobalto0 hace 2 años
una perdida de tiempo esta weona tonta
(48) sociobalto0 hace 3 años
pero si esta genio se esta perdiendo
(6) sociobalto hace 4 años
ni un aporte la ttttttttoooooonnnnnnnntttttt-ttttttttaaaaaaaaaa

²⁰ 3 out of 111, e.g. in ex. (27) below.

²¹ Particularly observed in birds and fish. According to sociological studies, groups of people may show a very similar flock-like behaviour.



Fig. 1: Setting the frame

opens the discussion with his comment *puta la wna pava :s*²² (cf. fig. 1). Both appear directly under the clip at the very top of the site. Thus ChIsPa2804 fixes the interactional norms and clearly influences the direction in which the discussion is supposed to develop. Secondly and adding to the same effect, his choice of category label *comedy* (*Comedia*),²³ under which the clip figures, sets both the frame and the criteria of choice of *Best comments* (*Mejores comentarios*).²⁴ After being shown the way by these introductory remarks and categorisations, all the other posted comments displayed on the screen unsurprisingly follow the same tenor,

²² All comments are reproduced in their original orthography.

²³ See *Mostrar más*.

²⁴ The selection presented in this section seems to be generated automatically and updated regularly by YouTube, not by the uploader, but contributes to the same effect, as does the reception indicated by the number of “likes” awarded by users (see below pp. 308 and 310).

with the first two comments literally repeating the uploader's title (cf. fig. 2):



Fig. 2: The first two comments on the audioclip *El Rumpy (la weona tonta)*

Comments on María have in common a definitely flaming illocutionary force, but differ with respect to form. One of the most frequent stylistic devices is to give offence by abusive name-calling in imitation and hyperbolic exaggeration of the uploader's input. Significantly, María is never referred to by this alias,²⁵ but always by unambiguously pejorative designations, e.g. *weona*²⁶ (*tonta*) and *puta*, the labels proposed initially by ChIsPa2804. *Weona* is by far the most frequently attributed name to the target, including orthographic variants²⁷ like *wena*, *wna*, *wea*, *wueona*, *hueona*, *awuona*,²⁸ and collocations with derogatory adjectives, or other colloquialisms referring to María's stupidity such as *pastel*, *volaita*, *weona floja*, *mina*²⁹ *weona*, *weona tonta* or *tonta weona*, *pava(aaa)*, *seca*, *pesaaa*,

²⁵ Two commentators mention what seems to be her real name Karen and another pseudonym, Carla, used by El Rumpy when during their conversation by a slip of her tongue she accidentally reveals her real name: *ke chistosa la KAREN XD pero mas wna ke ella sola wn wjajajajaja* (Carolina Araya hace 3 años); *Puta que es weona la carla...* (Medinak87 hace 3 años).

²⁶ The term *weona* is a Chilean colloquialism for 'person' in general, but is also used with a pejorative connotation.

²⁷ This term alone occurs in 53 of 111 comments.

²⁸ Most examples display various typical features of informal net orthography, such as abbreviations or otherwise shortened forms (e.g. consonantic skeletons), phonetic script, omission of accents, etc.

²⁹ 'mujer'.

weona inmadura, (*awuona*) *culia*³⁰ (and variants *culiá*, *kulia*, *qlia*, *floja reculia*³¹), *estúpida* (*elevada al 200*), *imbécil* (*inbesil*, *invesil*), *enferma de tonta*, *weona bruta*.³² Other frequent labels attached to María are vulgar sexismisms like (*qlia*) *penka* ('pene') and *puta* (including its variants *uta*,³³ *puta maraca*,³⁴ and *hija de puta*), *pela* ('puta'), *cabra culia weona* ('puta'), as well as scatological terms like (*perra de mierda*.³⁵

Other indirectly discrediting devices are irony, e.g. by dysphemism (*genio*, *pobresita*), and iconic paralinguistic devices which serve to mitigate or to intensify an FTA, e.g. emoticons in graphic imitation of overt sneering laughter:

- [illegible]

³⁰ Short form of *culeada* ('gillipollas'), which seems to have lost its sexual connotation.

³¹ The prefix *re-* is an intensifier.

³² Examples are listed according to their increasing degree of vulgarity.

³³ Omission of the first letter is a common device in informal Spanish net orthography.

³⁴ Intensification, since both mean 'puta'.

³⁵ There is one comment, *ta weando esa weona..no sabe qn descubrio america WTF!* (Andrés Carvajal hace 2 años), concluding with a vulgar English abbreviation ('what the fuck'), but altogether code mixing in this corpus is limited to two comments (cf. also ex. (23) below).

Like in (5), many comments echo³⁶ El Rumpy's flaming on María by means of literally taking up his phrases from the clip and intensifying their illocutionary force by typical typographic features of informal net discourse such as the use of capital letters, the provocative grapheme <k> which replaces Spanish <qu> or <c>, punctuation marks or by exaggerated laughter symbolised by grapheme repetition, and emoticons:

- (6) Carlos Herrera hace 2 años
despues volviste y repetiste?? si puta que soy pilla³⁷
jkajkajkjakajkakjaakj
- (7) iwannabeyourdog1969 hace 2 años
“cacharon.. cacharon lo que le pregunté, o no..?”³⁸
- (8) Die9U hace 4 años
KIEN DESKUBRIÓ AMERIKA??
- (9) TheMobec hace 3 años
wuaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaajajaajajaj no no no si no sabe quien descubrio
america la cortamos kjsajksjksajksajksajksajksaksajksajksjakj
- (10) Fraaanckox3 hace 3 meses
nonono, si no sabe quien descubrio america la cortamos..RUMPY
QLAO XDLLLLLLLLLL

These examples show that strategies in themselves are neither polite nor impolite, but functionally polyvalent and may refer to both targets at the same time, *María* and *El Rumpy*, with a contrary effect. The same techniques that are used to threaten *María's* face (quotes, name-calling, irony, typography) simultaneously operate as assertive statements about the presenter of the show and have

³⁶ On the other side, there is only one comment that takes up a direct quotation from María: *si estudiaba, lo que pasa es que repetía ahahgahahaha* (baltiloco delpuerto hace 2 años).

³⁷ Ironically for 'inteligente'.

³⁸ Use of quotation marks is exceptional in comments, the only incidences being (7) and (28).

to be regarded as dysphemistic face-flattering acts³⁹ (FFAs) with respect to him.⁴⁰ El Rumpy – unlike María – is praised for being *culiao* (*qliao*, *klao*, *qlao*, *qlo*), *chistoso*, *care palo*,⁴¹ *pesa(a)o*, *cocnhesumadre*,⁴² *manso*,⁴³ *weon seco*, etc.:

- (11) xoro0018 hace 1 año
jajaja rumpy qlo wn ! jajaja chistoso wn ! care palo xd
- (12) 00nightwolf00 hace 2 años
el qlo pesao jakajakjakaja wena vola el rumpi
- (13) Denny Muñoz hace 3 años
el cocnhesumadre pesaao xd
- (14) roguet17 hace 3 años
jajaja el manso filo del rumpi el weon seco la cago

As in the case of María, most comments convey subjectivity without being personal,⁴⁴ i.e. overt admiration and approval of El Rumpy's is expressed nearly exclusively by talking about him in the 3rd person. Yet for each target there is also one single case of direct address, (17) towards El Rumpy: *cortaste*, and (18) to María: *matate*, as if the targets were present on the YouTube platform:

- (15) blaismi09 hace 3 años
ji,ji,ji, pero que majete (bacan)⁴⁵ es el rumpi, super bien por cortarla a la mina por no saber quien descubrió América.Un beso desde España.

³⁹ Cf. Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2005 and 2011.

⁴⁰ Sceptical remarks about his action like the following, where uneasiness is expressed through the final emoticon, are very rare: *queee maaaaal wn...=/* (Aneurismo hace 3 años). If ever El Rumpy receives the blame for his action, he is excused in the same comment by María's stupidity, e.g.: *lidesaaaaagraaaaaadaaaaaableeeeeeee wnnnnn jajajajajajajaja mina tonta*.

⁴¹ 'sinvergüenza'.

⁴² Misspelling for *conchesumadre* / *conchetumadre* 'maricón, hijo de puta'.

⁴³ 'grande, tremendo'.

⁴⁴ None of the comments is written in explicit 1st person.

⁴⁵ Both *majete* (European Spanish) and *bacan* (American Spanish) are colloquial expressions meaning 'simpático'.

- (16) gu4r1 hace 3 años
jajajajaja el rumpy la mando a la xuxa⁴⁶ ajajajajaja por ser tan weona
- (17) eavluz hace 1 año
Noooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!!! no sabe quien descubrio America? Bien que la cortaste Rumpy, que onda la chica uff!! preocupante...
- (18) ztrong666 hace 2 años
CABRA CULIA WEONA , HIJA DE PUTA ESTUPIDA , VERGUENZA PARA EL HERMOSO SEXO FEMENINO , MATATE WEONA XDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDD!!!!!!

2.2. Flaming the uploader of the clip

As seen so far, commentators seem to agree with El Rumpy's scornful treatment of María. What on the surface would resemble a flaming FTA turns out to work as an FFA on the construction of the face of the presenter as well as – indirectly – that of ChIsPa2804, the user responsible for uploading this contents.

Besides direct comments which may relate either to the contents or to other comments,⁴⁷ the medium itself provides two other means of commenting: the “like” (👍 *Me gusta*) or “dislike button” (👎 *No me gusta*) and the so-called channel comments. The affirmative “like button” is generally used more often than the “dislike button”: the clip itself received 85 “likes” and only 9 “dislikes”.⁴⁸ These statements add to the spot's continuing perception as well as to group identity, since they represent approving FFAs to the faces of other

⁴⁶ ‘chucha’. The grapheme <x> is often used in net orthography to replace <ch>. *Mandar a alguien a la chucha* is a vulgar expression for ‘ponerlo en su lugar, retarlo, llamarle la atención severamente.’

⁴⁷ See below p. 311f.

⁴⁸ The current balance is displayed in the top section of the page and has an additional effect on the perception of the spot.

commentators and to that of the uploader respectively.⁴⁹ As a rule, disapproval towards the uploader of the clip is expressed neither in the comments⁵⁰ nor through “dislikes”, but can be found in a different section of the YouTube platform reserved for personal feedback to ChIsPa2804, in the 9 channel comments, where, interestingly and in contrast to the other comments, opinions are split between agreement and disagreement. As for the target María, FTAs in this section of the platform are again written in the same vulgar scatological language (*hijo de puta, hijo de mierda, tu padre mierda, lavate la concha, clasista* etc.) and include directly addressed overt threats (e.g. (20) *muerete*). A particular new strategy, limited to this section, are discriminating remarks about the uploader’s nationality (which is, indeed, the only information on his identity that he provides in his profile), e.g.:

(19) Carlo1654 ha publicado un comentario. hace 4 años

lavate la concha Chileno HIjo de puta y puto

(20) CotoThrashMetal ha publicado un comentario. hace 3 años

weonao ql....que es la U de chile ctm⁵¹ ...tu padre mierda.... teni al rumpy en tu futo....y vo sabi de que equipo es el de la T_T ... muerete ctm

In this way, support or admiration for ChIsPa2804 for offering this contents are once more accompanied by emoticons, so that comments such as (23), which at first glance seem to scoff or doubt the authenticity of the clip (*cheat*) and to question the face of

⁴⁹ Whilst the average score is between two and 4 “likes”, there are two comments which received noticeably more “likes”: *JUA JUA JUA!!! Si esa mina termina el 4to medio es por que la educacion es realmente una mierda!!!! JAJAJAJA!!!!* 28 ♡ (vassili1984 hace 3 años); *LAWEONA TONTA* 15 ♡ (Salvador Tenisi hace 4 años). It does not seem, however, that pressing the “like button” is a temporary convention that appears only in earlier comments.

⁵⁰ Amongst comments there appears only one – in face-flattering approval – addressed to the uploader of the clip: *weona tonta won...no pudiste ponerle mejor titulo!!!* (Emerson Galvez hace 4 meses).

⁵¹ Acronym for *conchetumadre* (cf. FN 42).

ChIsPa2804, are mitigated and turned into an FFA by terminating with an ironical smile and adding *pasalo*:

- (21) marlonloquendero12 ha publicado un comentario. hace 1 año
KAPO ke decis me suscribo y tu te suscribes a mi aplas XDDD.....qe
dices
- (22) Sailence X ha publicado un comentario. hace 4 años
ola men,, Viva Chile Wn!. yy wenos vid de conter,, lament-
ablemente los No Steam Cagaron, pork borraron toos los servers. en
fin,. PutaSteam. Adioz.yy me suscribi we,.
- (23) Fkoman ha publicado un comentario. hace 4 años
cual es ese cheat??? pasalo :P

2.3. Flaming as interaction between commentators

As seen above, the use of the various options of direct and indirect commenting provided by this social medium vary with respect to different functions (approval, disapproval) and levels of communication, that is the contents (targets María and El Rumpy), the uploader and the commentators themselves. As regards the latter, assertive actions such as echoing or topping each others' comments and the "like button" are the preferred indirect means of commenting on other users' flames (121 "likes" vs. 0 "dislikes").⁵² *Answer (Responder)* is another, less frequently employed option, which enables commentators to react and to interact directly with one another, e.g. in (24), where a provocative sexist comment evokes protest as well as consent:

⁵² "Likes" are distributed on only 21 comments out of 111. The entire lack of "dislikes" may be due to sanctioning, as two comments that received too many negative scores are displayed on the screen only on demand without showing the amount of "dislikes", and another comment has been removed completely for the same reasons.

(24) Intelchile hace 1 año

se supone ke las mujeres estan para procrear y satisfacer a los
hombres asike es normal esta mina

Carolina Araya hace 1 año

ke wea? uta el (weon tonto) xDDDD

keGko hace 1 año

y si luego se molestan si se los recuerda

On various occasions a metadiscussion⁵³ between commentators emerges that deviates from the original target itself and switches on to the question in which María failed, i.e. who was the first to discover America. In general, it is a rather mock-ironic tone that dominates this kind of interaction between commentators, e.g. (25), but this may turn into flaming shouting (by use of capital letters, e.g. (26) *ENCONTRÓ, DESCUBRIÓ*) when some commentators get involved in this topic more seriously than others, e.g.:

(25) Norman Loayza hace 2 meses

fueron los sajones jejejejejej

juvenor threat hace 2 meses

me dejò con la duda de quien descubriò america :c ⁵⁴

(26) metalero vina hace 3 años

la mina mas weona q las palomas y mas caliente q aceite de papas
fritas el que descubrio america fue cristobal colon el 12 de octubre
de 1492

blaismi09 hace 3 años

muchas gracias por la información, compadre,te pasaste! qué
enciclopedia consultaste! juaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaajaja!

Bastián silva espinoza hace 3 meses

Colón ENCONTRÓ América. Hernán Cortés lo DESCUBRIÓ.

⁵³ As the chronology of comments in (26) and (27) shows, discussions do not necessarily take place simultaneously with the timeline but develop over time, and hence polylogical discussions are constituted only in retrospection.

⁵⁴ Comments in (25) have to be read bottom-up.

Later on, another polylogical metadiscussion breaks out on the same question, when one commentator (ScreggaeaficionBw, in reaction to Jerónimo Herrera Godoy) seeks to defend María twice and is in response blamed by other commentators (TheKinglalo, SuperZapaZ) for being such a “smart ass”:⁵⁵

(27) ScreggaeaficionBw hace 2 años

quien descubrio america? no fue colon, ahora es un hecho que colon fue uno más, y no el primero, ni siquiera los historiadores saben quien fue el primero en llegar a America, entonces que esta mina no sepa, no es algo extraño.

Robert Peña hace 1 año

solo tienes que fijarte en lo que le enseñan a cada uno desde pequeño ps... pa que te vay en la profunda.. jajaja.. xD

SuperZapaZ hace 2 años

buscandole la quinta pata al gato

ScreggaeaficionBw hace 2 años

es enserio, no es por buscarle la pata al gato, es injusto que la tachen de tonta por no saber quien descubrio america cuando ni siquiera tu sabes y ni siquiera los historiadores.

TheKinglalo hace 1 año

aweonao!!!!!!!

SuperZapaZ hace 2 años

VAMOS POR LA SEXTA PATA

Jerónimo Herrera Godoy hace 2 años

En realidad Colón no descubrió América. Sólo encontró algo que millones conocían antes que él. PERO ESTA WNA LA CAGA WN !!!⁵⁶

Seen generally however, flaming is clearly an accepted part of net standards, and interactional norms are not subject to negotiation

⁵⁵ Other aspects of commentators’ faces, e.g. avatars, nicknames, are neither positively nor negatively evaluated by users.

⁵⁶ Comments in (27) have to be read bottom-up.

between users and posters: the highly derogatory and vulgar lexical and stylistic registers in which many comments are composed pass without discussion. The same applies to orthography, which is full of variants and hardly ever criticised; there are, in fact, only two cases of metacommunicative flaming, i.e. in (28) when Sir WyldeBLS blames Nicolás Arancibia and is subsequently given the blame by Carlos Javier Miles Cuevas:

(28) Nicolás Arancibia hace 3 años

“Si no sabe kien descubrió América la cortamos” weona invetil jajaja

Carlos Javier Miles Cuevas hace 2 años

te preocupas de las tildes, pero te caes en el “Kien” xD

Sir WyldeBLS hace 2 años

y vo con esa ortografia no estay muy lejos compadre! IMBECIL!

Jajajajaja

3. Conclusion

At first glance, the extent of flaming in comments with respect to contents offered on YouTube may seem fairly startling. The anonymity of cyberspace definitely favours this type of comment, since flammers have to fear “little life retribution for their actions on such platforms” (Nitin et al. 2011: 427). Nevertheless, this still does not explain completely why behaviour, which according to common standards of politeness would have to be regarded as highly impolite and therefore unacceptable, has apparently established itself as a completely acceptable part of face work within the culture of the net. On closer examination, what from outside looks like face-damaging behaviour “can be ‘normal’ in a given community of practice” (Bousfield 2010: 105). Social Media apparently create their own standards and identities, which may differ from

those of everyday offline interaction and allow people “to write things online that they would seldom consider saying face-to-face” (Alonzo/Aiken 2004: 205). One motive why users follow these standards and practise this type of face work is in order to show themselves to be a legitimate part of a particular net community by displaying the appropriate behaviour.⁵⁷

Furthermore the example analysed in this paper shows that flaming in a strongly – in this case doubly – mediated, multimedial and multilevel communicative context may not always be regarded as face-damaging behaviour, at least not with respect to all “participants”. The target afflicted by this kind of face work is not necessarily the person who is responsible for having uploaded the contents; on the contrary, flaming is directed at the target of the contents him- or herself. In this case, the target under attack is a “third party” completely unknown to the uploader or to the commentators. Hardly anybody defends this widely exhibited “third party”; in fact, most of the flaming comments at the expense of the target María unanimously agree in causing additional damage to her face, whereas the same flaming strategies regarding her counterpart, the target El Rumpy, serve a different function, namely to strengthen his face. Comments are on the whole affirmative and assertive and thus, at the next level, similarly strengthen the uploader’s face too, since they confirm his predefined point of view and communication standards regarding the targets. In this sample the collective discursive construction of face(s) through flaming at different levels clearly aims at consensus rather than confrontation, conversation rather than discussion,⁵⁸ with the effect that an intrinsically conflictive, face-attacking strategy such as flaming is used here as an approving, face-enhancing strategy.

⁵⁷ *Politic behaviour* in terms of Watts 1992 and 2003.

⁵⁸ See before. Controversial remarks blaming ChIsPa2804 for having uploaded this clip are “hidden” in the separate section of channel comments.

In addition, both the uploader by offering to share a content of this sort with others and exposing another person publicly under the label of *comedy*, as well as commentators who join in his construction of faces, succeed in getting themselves in the public eye and topping one another as entertaining characters, who do not only believe in the same values but laugh at the same entertainment. Flaming thus acquires another dimension in this communicative context, i.e. *entertaining impoliteness*.⁵⁹ Unlike Moor et al., who from their poll amongst users conclude that flaming on YouTube “is more often intended to express disagreement or as a response to a perceived offence by others” (2010: 1536), this example proves that its entertaining function should not be underestimated as a prior underlying motivation for flaming in this type of Social Media.⁶⁰

Social Media such as YouTube provide their own microcosm for entertainment⁶¹ based on calumnies. This particular type of face work can be classified as *collective flaming for entertaining purpose*. The question remains as to whether this kind of flaming is part of global net identity or culturally dependent as earlier studies on the use of obscene language and swearing in Spanish-speaking communities would suggest.⁶²

⁵⁹ In terms of Culpeper 2011, who specifies three functional types of “impoliteness events”: affective impoliteness, coercive impoliteness and entertaining impoliteness. According to Culpeper 2011: 233f. it is decisive for cases of entertaining impoliteness, “that others, aside from the target, can understand the probable impoliteness effects for the target. Without this it would not be entertaining impoliteness.” Besides voyeuristic pleasure and the pleasure of feeling superior, it is the pleasure of feeling safe that is involved in this type of entertainment.

⁶⁰ Whether or not only “individuals who have a high level of disinhibition seeking and assertiveness” tend to flame for pass time and for entertainment, as Alonzo/Aiken 2004: 211 claim from their survey, cannot be decided from this analysis.

⁶¹ For Androutsopoulos 2010: 430, the emergence of the entertaining “spectacle” genre is the most innovative aspect of Web 2.0.

⁶² YouTube provides the following information about users who clicked this clip: They live mainly in Chile, Sweden or Spain and are mostly males, aged 25 to 34, 18 to 24, or 35 to 44 (cf. YouTube 2009). If these user profiles established by YouTube trustworthily reflect

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reality and the identity of those who left a comment, the results of this study seem to correspond with observations by Gómez Molina 2002, Alonzo/Aiken 2004, Zimmermann 2005, Martínez Lara 2009, and others, according to which (young) males tend to flame more than females. Chilean and Spanish informants consulted with regard to my corpus would also confirm this. – On the widely discussed question of universality of politeness phenomena see Bravo 2004, Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2004, amongst others.

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Bettina Kluge – Hildesheim

The Collaborative Construction of an Outsider as a Troll in the Blogosphere of Latin American Immigrants to Quebec, Canada

1. Introduction

Communication crucially depends on trust. And indeed, most of the time interactants are collaborating towards a common conversational goal. But sometimes, it is more fun to go against the established rules of communication – at least for the one who is breaking the rules. In this contribution, I will focus on the practice of trolling, a more or less ludic manner of deceiving others about one's own identity for the purpose of disrupting an online community's normal business. As an example, I will consider a case within a blogging community of migrants and prospective migrants to the Canadian province of Quebec. This is a very closely-knit community which offers crucial emotional and logistic support to its members in the long and uncertain process of applying for permanent residence status. The emerging blogosphere can be described as a *Community of Practice* (Wenger 1998). Members typically encourage each other in this crucial phase of their lives; however, in the case study to be presented, one commentator warns the blogger against migration to Quebec using very strong, personally hurtful language. After an initial exchange between this

commentator and the blogger, the commentator is subsequently labelled a troll by other commentators and portrayed as an outsider to the community. The incident can be shown to have lasting repercussions in the blogging community. In this article, I will hence argue that trolling incidents can be used by the community to collaboratively construct an outsider, and by this means enhance group cohesion and reassert the group's values and communicative norms.

Before turning to the actual data, I will consider previous research on trolling. In fact, while a quick search on the Internet leads to a heap of examples where users are accused of being trolls, there is "surprisingly little academic research" on the topic of trolling, as Hardaker (2010: 224) stresses. There are even fewer studies on trolling within the linguistic and interactional framework. Also, I will argue that more attention must be given to the facts that a) communication in the Social Media has multiple addressees, and that b) trolling (and the accusation of trolling) has consequences for the identity construction of the interactants involved.

2. Trolling on the Internet

The exact definition of what constitutes a troll in the context of virtual discourse is unclear. Most researchers apparently draw their definitions of trolling behaviour from the media and their own intuition: "As such, 'trolling' has become a catch-all term for any number of negatively marked online behavior" (Hardaker 2010: 224). While Shachaf/Hara's (2010) study on Wikipedia trolls focuses on generally disruptive, destructive behaviour of Wikipedia 'contributors' (with trolls deleting or introducing non-relevant information into Wikipedia articles), most studies (Tepper 1997; Donath 1999; Herring et al. 2002; Hardaker 2010) examine users

who first enter into a Social Media community – typically news-groups, online forums or, as in our case, blog communities –, engage in them and then start trolling. Trolling can broadly be defined as “being deliberately antagonistic online, usually for amusement’s sake” (Hardaker 2013: 58), but also, crucially, includes concealing one’s identity and intentions, the subsequent loss of trust by others and the possibility of lasting effects within the community in question.

For the rest of this paper I will adopt Hardaker’s corpus-based definition of who should count as a troll:

A troller is a CMC user who constructs the identity of sincerely wishing to be part of the group in question, including professing, or conveying pseudo-sincere intentions, but whose real intention(s) is/are to cause disruption and/or to trigger or exacerbate conflict for the purposes of their own amusement. (Hardaker 2010: 237)

Hardaker (2010) is the first to base her study on a large-scale corpus in which she compares user-based moves to label another user as a troll with definitions found in academic literature. In her study of an equestrian newsgroup, all messages posted within the years 2001-2010 have been searched via WordSmith for the string [troll*]. Even while missing out on some comments where the word *troll* does not show up in the near environment, the search produces over 2.000 hits. Since a troller’s ‘real intentions’ are hard to discern from their contributions alone, it is no surprise that Hardaker’s study shows only one case where the incident was acknowledged as a case of trolling by the troller. In most examples, users speculate about a certain user’s apparent troll identity and warn others. Some of the techniques that raise suspicion in the other users, as described in the literature, include the following:

- “aggressive, malicious behavior undertaken with the aim of annoying or goading others into retaliating” (Hardaker

2010: 231), also including hostility and disrespect – this is the most often agreed-upon verbal behaviour that deserves the label ‘troll’

- disruptive behaviour, including “meaningless, irrelevant, or repetitive posts aimed at attention-seeking or response-generating” (Hardaker 2010: 232)
- dissemination of poor or false advice
- continued troll-like behaviour even after being warned
- if confronted on-record, accused users may “deny the accusations, plead ignorance or inexperience, brand those who block them as censorious or cowardly, or even accuse individuals who confront them of being trolls themselves” (Hardaker 2010: 228)

The concept of trolling, however, has changed somewhat over the years. Tepper (1997), for instance, portrays trolling as techniques initially employed to gently tease new members (newbies). She demonstrates this with examples from the Usenet group *alt.folklore.urban* (AFU).¹ These techniques could include references to topics that have been discussed extensively before as well as typos that are usually only corrected by new members. Trolling hence serves as an initiation ritual to newbies and as an important device to signal in-group status to long-standing members. They will “identify the troll, will not be baited by it, and may even mock those who are” (Hardaker 2010: 224). ‘Troll’ here refers as much to the person as to the activity. Some years later,² the definition of the term broadens to include deceitful hidings of one’s own intentions to belittle other people and to make fun of them, as discussed in

¹ The OED gives as the earliest attestation of troll in this meaning an example from AFU dated December, 14 1992 (cf. Oxford English Dictionary Online 2012).

² The English Wikipedia version (s.v. ‘troll (Internet)’) suggests the end of the 1990s, when Usenet groups such as AFU became more popular.

The Collaborative Construction of an Outsider as a Troll

Herring et al.'s (2002) influential study of a male discussant in a feminist forum who is ultimately removed from the newsgroup. Donath (1999) and Hardaker (2010; 2013) describe trolls giving advice on motorcycling and on horse training. This behaviour, in contrast to simply jesting, might cause actual harm, if carried out in earnest.

While the metaphor of trolling initially described a fishing technique (in the sense of fishing with long lines, see above the reference to newbies being 'baited' by older group members), nowadays trolls are more often personified and tend to relate to the mythical Scandinavian figures of mischievous creatures "waiting under the bridge to snare innocent bystanders" (Herring et al. 2002: 372). See Graphics 1 and 2 for examples of popular depictions of internet trolls: the Trollface, created by the artist Whyne, which quickly became a part of popular culture and an internet meme in itself; and an example for the slogan 'Don't feed the troll'.



Graphic 1: Trollface (Wikipedia 2012)



Graphic 2: Don't feed the troll (Virtuose Marketing 2012)

In both instances, the activity of trolling as fishing with bait is discarded as the main meaning, in favour of a conceptualisation of a troll as a non-human, at times even monster-like living being. Yet the notion of trolling as baiting is still attested in Hardaker's corpus.

What makes trolling unique and distinguishes it from other practices such as flaming (cf. Danet 2013; also Helfrich, this volume, and the literature cited therein) and hacking is the deception inherent to an act of trolling: the sincerity of the question posed, the advice given, or the identity proclaimed as one's own is questionable and in many cases questioned by other users. In fact, this is precisely why concepts such as rudeness, impoliteness, and verbal aggression do not fit the behaviour labelled trolling (as is discussed extensively in Hardaker 2010: 216-219). Bousfield (2008; especially chapters 5.1 and 5.2), enlarging on the work of Culpeper (1996), lays out a tentative typology of realisations of impoliteness, among them 'Seek disagreement / avoid agreement', 'Use taboo words – swear, or use abusive or profane language', 'Condescend, scorn or ridicule – emphasise your relative power', 'sarcasm / mock politeness'. All these strategies can be found in trolls, but they do not touch on the central issue of deceit, misused trust, and uncertainty of intention that annoy or hurt the victims of a troll, often more than the act of trolling itself.

Two studies focusing on the deception of other users are Donath (1999) and Hardaker (2010; 2013), with examples from different newsgroups (wedding, motorcycle, equestrians). It is very revealing that these groups are very supportive, with people apparently caring a lot for each other. A troll can wreak greater havoc in such groups than in loosely-knit, fun-oriented communities (e.g. Failblog, a website where users regularly engage in trolling, and are regularly touted for doing so³). Thus, an interpretation of a

³ See for example Failblog 2012 – here, a video shown on the Jimmy Kimmel Show is commented on: "Who is the brunette, she looks really familiar?", to which user 'Troll' responds: "its jimmy kimmel". The initial poster rebukes this answer, to which two other users respond, one by posting a link to a web dictionary's entry of 'sarcasm', another (?) user called 'Explanation' with the response "He was trolling (hence the name)". The very fact that a user should choose a user name indicative of their trolling activities also

particular contribution from a troll is very much dependent on the specific group in question, the particular activity the group engages in, and also on previous experiences of the users (newbies vs. more experienced members of the community in question who might even enjoy playing with the troll and mocking them).

How, then, should a community deal with trolls? Since trolls want to elicit response from others, the most common way of counter-action – or at least the one that is most often suggested – is to NOT feed the troll, in the sense of not responding. As Donath (1999: 48) stresses, “[r]esponding to a troll is very tempting, especially since these posts are designed to incite.” In a newsgroup or blog, this might mean having to abandon a particular thread of discussion and turn to other ones instead. Based on her corpus, Hardaker (2010: 237) distinguishes four major outcomes:

- 1) Trolling is frustrated “if users correctly interpret an attempt to troll, but are not provoked to respond”.
- 2) Trolling is thwarted “if users correctly interpret an attempt to troll, but counter in such a way as to curtail or neutralise the success of the troller”.
- 3) Trolling fails “if users do not correctly interpret an attempt to troll and are not provoked by the troller”.
- 4) Trolling succeeds if users “believe the troller’s pseudo-intention(s) and are provoked to respond sincerely”.

Another outcome indicated by Donath (1999) and Hardaker (2010; 2013) can be seen as a subcase of 2: people correctly interpret an attempt to troll, but deem the bait too dangerous for other, less experienced users. For example, if a troll posts techniques for de-clawing a cat that would cause the animal extreme pain, users may respond to the post, even when suspecting or knowing a post to be

shows that trolling is perceived as an integral ‘part of the game’ on this website (also cf. similar arguments by Helfrich, this volume).

bait for fear that less knowledgeable readers, present and future ones, would take the bait as a piece of well-intended and good advice. As Hardaker's examples show, such responses are often quite witty and border on counter-trolling. Finally, Hardaker also points out the case when users publish a message in a mock troll format, with the aim of enhancing group cohesion and affection. Her example of mock trolling is so outrageously overblown that all users of the particular newsgroup she investigated should correctly identify the posting as non-genuine. Nevertheless, just in case, the message was signed for the hard-to-understand: "Love, Trollerita" (example 25, Hardaker 2010: 230).

In contrast to the findings above, two aspects in trolling research so far have received less attention than they merit: the inherently polylogous nature of communication⁴ on the websites where trolling is attested, and face. Concerning multiple addressees, Hardaker provides many examples of users speculating about third parties' troll-like nature, "at once employing the face-saving strategy of not engaging with the troller directly, and also the offensive face-attacking strategy of talking about the troller as though she is nonexistent" (2010: 236). But even her discussions of outcomes boils down to the question whether a troll is correctly interpreted as such and responded to. In most cases, most users (and researchers) are ignorant of a particular user's malicious intent, since most trolls will not 'blow their cover' after a successful troll.⁵

⁴ For the concept of polylogues in computer-mediated communication, cf. Marcoccia 2004.

⁵ As Hardaker stresses, "users may perceive trolling where none exists, and miss it when it occurs" (2013: 62). Hardaker 2010 and 2013 also discusses the inability to identify speaker's and hearer's intention, arguing that it is this "accidental or deliberate ambiguity" of communication that "provides the very opening for a troller to exploit" (Hardaker 2013: 63). In fact, intentions might even be changing during an ongoing communication. Imagine a user who might not have intended a troll initially, but after being rebuked and (erroneously) called a troll, they decide, for reasons of face-protection, to pose as a troll and aggravate verbal contributions – a case that shows that speaker intention and hearer perception are fluid and dynamic.

Independent of their being successful or not, trolls are seen as being the product of a rather two-sided communication: between the suspected troll and the community. This must be seen as an idealisation: 'the community' consists of different members, present as well as future ones, with different degrees of involvement, experience, length of membership, different opinions on a subject, etc. Thus, in the subsequent analysis, I will emphasise the effect trolling has on the community and how the community reasserts its rules of what is seen as good communicative behaviour.

In line with this behaviour is the notion of face (cf. also the discussion of face in online communication by Ehrhardt, this volume) – not so much of particular individuals, but of the community as a whole. Research on face matters has recently shifted its focus to the management of interpersonal relations, more than on one's own individual face needs. An example is Arundale's (2006) proposal for a framework in which face is seen as relational and as being continually reconstructed in ongoing interaction. Research on face in the Social Media also needs to consider that many interactions are polylogues with multiple addressees, and that we witness a many-to-many communication even in cases where contributions are explicitly addressed to a specific person: as long as a contribution is not distributed via an alternative communication channel (e.g. private messaging), it is publicly available. Thus, besides 'communicating with each other' we also find 'communicating about person A in a way so that they will know it'. Again, the most important point here is a particular community's communicative norm, the 'rules of conduct' so to speak. In some communities it is more acceptable to engage in ludic behaviour, and more difficult to draw the line between witty, although somewhat aggressive behaviour and trolling for the sake of trolling. In the case of the blog community analysed in the present study, this is not the case but sincerity and personal reputation is valued highly.

3. A case study: the interactive construction of a troll

The following analysis is part of an ongoing project on collaborative identity construction in the Social Media in a migration context (for more information, cf. Kluge 2011; Kluge in press; Frank-Job/ Kluge 2012). Migrants and prospective migrants to the Canadian province of Quebec turn to the Social Media, especially blogs and forums, to get information, to meet people with similar experiences and to feel that they are not alone with their problems and anxieties in a moment of their lives where everything appears fluid and uncertain. They discuss topics with strangers who, strangely, might feel less like strangers than family and friends, since they have something in common: the wish to migrate to another country and start a new life, and the uncertainties experienced during the application process. Bloggers not only write their own blog, but also read other people's blogs, and leave comments there. By their common blogging practices, they form a rather close-knit *Community of Practice* (Wenger 1998, henceforth abbreviated as CoP), since, in the process, they come to share "beliefs, values, ways of doing things, ways of talking, – in short, practices – as a function of their joint engagement in activity." (Eckert 2000: 35).⁶

Generally speaking, and in comparison to French- and English-speaking bloggers from the same corpus, the Latin American blogging community presents itself as very supportive of each other (further shown in Kluge, in press). For example, new bloggers are routinely welcomed by older members and encouraged in their

⁶ In fact, the blogosphere of people interested in migrating to Canada and Quebec can be shown to be formed by several, only partially interlinked CoP, mostly separated along language barriers.

immigration project. This, precisely, is the reason why negative voices that caution others not to migrate are treated as deviant: they do not entirely adhere to the CoP's implicit function to give emotional support to each other. We will see how interactants who voice negative opinions – if they do not proceed with caution – are in danger of being treated as intruders and outsiders of the CoP.

3.1. The data

The specific blog post in question comes from the blog *Desafío Québec* (<http://desafioquebec.blogspot.com>). Its authors are the Buenos Aires-based couple Terry and Naty (who I will abbreviate T and N, respectively, and T&N if referring to them acting as a couple), Terry being the main blogger. The blog describes their preparations for immigration to Quebec and the subsequent move and accommodating to life 'up north'. Responding to their second post, published on July 10, 2007, is an anonymous blogger (who I will call Anónimo, or A). A tells them to stay in Buenos Aires and to reconsider their decision to emigrate to Quebec. His statement is very aggressive in tone and content, which is answered in kind by Terry and also by other readers of the blog, both immigrants and immigrants-to-be. They all concur that while admittedly not everything is perfect in Quebec, A has by far crossed the line of polite behaviour and cannot be taken seriously. He is ultimately labelled a troll, a notorious troublemaker, and T&N are advised not to take him seriously. All in all, the original post received 35 comments over a time period of several months, and even later blog posts as well as comments to other posts refer to the debate with A. In order to facilitate orientation, Appendix 1 gives an overview on the interaction between Terry and Naty, Anónimo and further commentators.

As in many other blogs in our corpus (e.g. Kluge 2011; 2012), in the first days after publication of their first blog post on July 8, 2007, the new bloggers T&N are welcomed by the blogosphere, showing acceptance of them in the CoP. After several months of 'silence' (in which T&N have published other entries to their blog), Anónimo then 'reopens' the second blog entry with his comment no. 3. It is unclear why he chooses this particular blog post (a video of snow in Buenos Aires). Most subsequent comments (4-28) are published within the next month, between the end of December 2007 and mid-January 2008, first (3-11) in dialogic form between T and A, then (12-28) with more and more members of the blogosphere joining and siding with T&N. Comments 29-32 are from February 2008. Comments 33-35 are somewhat belated reactions of the blogosphere to the discussion, but are not further acknowledged by T&N (unlike previous comments in January 2008).

Besides Anónimo, only the writer of comments 34 and 35 does not reveal his or her real identity in either in the comment or through the blogger name. There are some similarities to A's writing style (especially the use of capital letters); however, the author identifies as a female doctor from Uruguay with husband and child. This being true or not, I will count the author of comments 34 and 35 as distinct from the author of comments 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 16, 18 and 31, that is, the person who is later labelled a troll. Anónimo self-identifies as a Chilean doctoral student who now lives in Montreal, and is treated as male (an ascription which A does not protest, so I too will consider A as such).

The incident also generates further comments, especially in the last days of 2007 and at the beginning of 2008, in comments to other blog posts published by T&N. For example, on January 6, 2008 (responding to the blog post published on August 3, 2007), a reader called Mordi advises them to simply stop answering A and arguing with him. While not calling A a troll, Mordi suggests to

ignore him, as he only writes in order to provoke: “No vale la pena perder el tiempo y contestarle tantas veces. Sólo escribe para molestar. Es uno entre tantos.”⁷

3.2. Analysis

So what exactly did A do? From the many comments he posted, the most exemplary ones have been selected to illustrate the analysis. I will initially concentrate on the first messages (3-5, two by A, one by T) in order to show the way towards ‘escalation’, and then focus on the entry of the CoP into the discussion. After T&N’s initial post, two supportive comments are followed by A’s first appearance:

(1) Comment no. 3: 27 de diciembre de 2007 23:52

Anónimo dijo...

a QUIEN SEA: Creo que no es una buena idea inmigrar a Montreal. Aca se van a encontrar con muchas sorpresas como, por ejemplo, que los servicios de salud son malisimos. Los servicios en Argentina o Chile son mucho mejor, mismo los servicios publicos o indigentes. [...] La gente: hediondos y sucios: el metro es una basofia y los negros de mierda y los chinos e hindues son muy pero muy hediondos y cochinos. Pueden pasar semanas sin tomar una ducha. [...] Si tienen una buena posicion economica en su pais, NO VENGAN A CANADA para quedarse, esto aburre. Y la gente que viene aca lo hace solo para trabajar en cosas casi humillantes: he visto medicos ecuatorianos y peruanos limpiando ascensores. Ademas la gente vive solo para trabajar y no hay vida de familia. En resumen: una mierda.

In his comment, A gives seven reasons why he thinks that it is not a good idea to migrate to Montreal: bad health system, bad educa-

⁷ Throughout this paper, I will not provide translations of the Spanish original text, but will try to reframe the gist of the respective arguments during the analysis.

tion, filthy people, horrible bureaucracy, freezing climate, immigrants have to take jobs much below their qualification, people have to work long hours and have no family life. His wording is not always very polite (especially when qualifying visible minorities on the metro system as *negros de mierda*), but at least, this is his point of view, expressed very clearly and unequivocally. As Herring et al. (2002) observe, a troll's first comment often contains strong language and an opinion that incites to reply, but still stays 'within the limits'. Strangely, A's comment is addressed "a QUIEN SEA", possibly indicating that he not only intends T&N as his readers.

Twelve hours later, the couple responds in a direct comment to A. Simultaneously, T posts his/their answer as a new blog post, thus appealing to a larger public. This new blog post also receives eight comments (six of them again within the first six weeks), which however will not be dealt with in this article. Here the direct answer to A:

(2) Comment no. 4: 28 de diciembre de 2007 12:32

Desafío Québec: Terry, Naty y Nico dijo...

A quien sea (el que escribió):

1) Me gustaria que dejaras de ser anónimo.

2) No busquemos un paraiso en Canada, sino un país donde se respetan las leyes y a donde a la gente de cualquier procedencia no se las trata como en su querida Chile o Argentina (como decis "negros de mierda")

3) La educación de una persona empieza con la familia. Y ninguna universidad del mundo puede enseñarte los valores esenciales de la vida (se nota que a vos te faltó eso)

[...]

6) Si tanto te disgusta, porque aún estas ahí? O te gusta vivir en la MIERDA, como dices? [...]

Taras

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T's answer is politely restrained, he rebuts several of A's expressions (e.g. *negro de mierda*), but also includes some direct attacks to A's face, e.g. the insult to A's family that has failed to teach him the 'essential values of life'. T also asks why A is still in Quebec, if he dislikes the place so much. This is answered, another twelve hours later, by A in comments 5 and 6 (the latter an addendum published one hour and a half after the previous comment):

(3) Comment no. 5: 29 de diciembre de 2007 01:10

Anonimo dijo...

Oye tontorron, te estoy tratando de dar un punto de vista para que despues no te arrepientas. Yo no me he ido de aca porque debo terminar mi doctorado, dudo que lo sepas, pero generalmente un doctor se prepara 4 anos como minimo. Lamentablemente elegi mal el lugar. [...] Oye, si te digo esto es porque lo he visto largo tiempo y creo que es necesario no tener altas expectativas respecto a Quebec. Es bonito, pero todo es artificial y el pueblo quebeco no tiene historia, es un pueblo que nacio muerto. Y son flojos los hijos de puta.

Ultimo reamarque: yo pense que la Argentina y Chile eran paises atrasados. JAJA! Ya veras aca a los libaneses, iranies e hindues entre otros, que son los que forman la gran masa. Tu juzgaras. No te olvides de lo que te digo, pues se que se arrepentiran.

Comment no. 6: 29 de diciembre de 2007 02:44

Anónimo dijo...

oye se me olvidaba, yo no tengo nada contra negros ni chinos ni nadie. Pero cuando veas a esos cholos mamones escupir en el metro o comerse los mocos en las vias publicas te vas a cordar del termino 'asqueroso'. Al menos en Chile uno no acostumbra a ver eso, porque si se te sale un gas por cualquiera de tus orificios la gente te manda a la mierda, como debe ser. Tal vez en la Argentina es distinto, pero no en Chile. Y dejate de mamonear, mira que los ucranianos aca trabajan barriendo calles.

We witness here the increasing use of verbally aggressive behaviour: name-calling (of T: *oye tontorrón*, of autochthonous québécois:

hijos de puta; quebecos (instead of more neutral *quebequenses*), of other immigrants: *cholos mamones*), insults of both the people from his host country (as lazy and racist) and of other immigrants (as filthy and uncivilised; again mostly those of a visible, non-Latino minority). A also employs a rather condescending tone towards T, already by use of the interaction marker *oye*, as if T was a small child that constantly needs to refocus on the text. The next comments (6-11) published within the next two days still are a verbal exchange between T and A, again with increasing verbal aggression and name calling. T begins to distance himself from A by changing from initial solidary *vos* in comment no. 4 to more distanced *usted* and *Sr. Anónimo* most of the time (there are some pointed switches to *vos*) and tries to counter A's arguments (which he qualifies as *argumentos ridículos*). Each contestant disqualifies the other as stupid and ignorant. While they are mainly poised towards each other as main addressees, it is obvious that they also write for a larger public. This is even clearer in the case of Terry. For example, in his opening remark in comment no. 10, T talks about *Dr. Anonimo* in third person:

(4) Comment no. 10: 30 de diciembre de 2007 02:55

Desafío Québec: Terry, Naty y Nico dijo...

"Oye, tu tienes hijo y senora. Ya veras que si ella no trabaja aca les va a costar mucho la vida. Yo estoy con mi familia tambien y gracias a Dios tengo una buena beca que me permite casi no hacer nada sino estudiar."⁸

Yo no entiendo, porque Dr. Anonimo piensa que todos deben tener la misma experiencia que el? Es absurdo!!!!

Estas frases como "Ya veras", "te arrepentirás", "vas a ver" ... De hecho, veo que no todo es tan malo en su vida (beca que le permite "casi no hacer nada", por ejemplo). [...]

⁸ The quotation marks indicate that Terry quotes from A's previous comment.

In this comment, T threatens A's face by referring to A as *Dr. Anónimo* in a mocking and provocative tone (thus ascribing him a status that A states to want to attain in the future), but more importantly, by talking about him in third person, as if A were absent and the comment addressed to the rest of the readers of the blog. T also criticises A's constant predictions ("ya verás, te arrepentirás, vas a ver") that T will ultimately have the same experience and feel sorry that he did not take A's advice to stay in Buenos Aires. T&N stress, several times, that they are looking for *testimonios*, not only the good ones but that they also want to learn from the negative experiences of their readers. However, they also stress that their intent to migrate is unchallenged (e.g. "En realidad no queremos escuchar solo buenos comentarios comentarios [sic]. Nos interesa tener información lo más objetiva posible como para poder tener una visión mas cierta de la realidad en Quebec. Siempre basados en el respeto." – comment no. 26, written by Natalia, January 14, 2008). The very Latin American textual genre of *testimonio* consists of giving testimony of one's own personal experiences in the sense of saying how it is, but without prescriptive elements – this, it appears, is one of A's 'mistakes' in the discussion with T&N.

Resuming the discussion, up to comment 11, A is increasingly treated as an intruder by T&N. T tries to convince A of his viewpoint, but is unsuccessful. This is the moment the CoP changes from simply over-reading the exchange between T and A to a more visible reaction, namely in the form of public comments (T&N might also have received personal emails of support, which we do not know of). Above all, the CoP begins to openly side with T&N by complimenting their blog in general, and their reflected answers to A in particular. For example, comment no. 19 by Gus Comas says, "Terry, muy interesante las respuestas al anonimo y celebro tu inteligencia y sentido común." The blogosphere ac-

knowledges in their comments that T&N have spent considerable time on their decision to migrate and do not expect a paradise – in contrast to A, whose decision to pursue a doctorate in a country he claims to despise shows, in the eyes of the community, his exclusion from the CoP. Pointedly, A is very rarely addressed directly, which is in accordance with the well-known strategy of ‘not feeding the trolls’ (see Graphic 2). Talking about someone as if they were not present is of course very face-damaging (as pointed out by Hardaker 2010, cf. ch. 2). See for example comment no. 22, in which A is openly labelled a troll:

(5) Comment no. 22: 7 de enero de 2008 22:37

andres dijo...

Consulto el blog con regularidad, es una herramienta muy valiosa para los interesados en el tema de la migración a Québec. Es una lástima que trolls anónimos estén ensuciando el blog con comentarios racistas y ofensivos. Igual, tienes mucha paciencia para responder las tonterías del anónimo, porque él no va a cambiar, seguirá igual de frustrado y de ignorante. Pero tres tipos como esos, pueden arruinar el trabajo de un blog, mejor desde ya eliminar esos comentarios que nada aportan.

felicitaciones por el blog.

Again, T&N are congratulated for their blog that is categorised as a very useful tool for those interested in migrating to Quebec, an act that is publicly enhancing T&N’s face. Andres then expresses his regret that anonymous trolls are defaming the blog by racist and offensive remarks. He denotes A as stupid, frustrated and ignorant without addressing him directly. Still, it is very likely that A will also have read this comment and understood it as intended.

One comment (of four) that does indeed address A directly is comment no. 12, by Roberto Román, a fellow Chilean who nevertheless sides with T&N and refutes many of the arguments A has given initially, by pointing to his own personal migration experience.

Roberto first directs most of his comment to T&N and the rest of the CoP, and turns to address A only in the last paragraph:

(6) Comment Nr 12: 30 de diciembre de 2007 14:30

Roberto Román dijo...

Veo que mi comentario había quedado en otro lado, así que lo copio aquí:⁹

Lamento los comentarios de "anónimo", justamente de eso hablaba esta tarde con mi esposa, una gran cantidad de chilenos se dedican a decir brutalidades cuando algo no les gusta, no se preocupan de conocer, apreciar o comprender. [...]

Así que "anónimo" cómete tu amargura y soberbia solo, vuelvete a Chile, donde seguirás siendo el cuico de siempre que pisotea al resto de la "plebe". Por lo demás el hecho de firmar anónimamente demuestra cobardía.

Roberto here tells A to shut up and return to Chile, labelling him as an arrogant member of the upper class (*cuico de siempre*). He, as did Terry in his comment no. 3, also shows his irritation that A remains anonymous and links this to cowardice.¹⁰ (As noted in Appendix 1, A did respond to this, apparently very furiously, in comment no. 16 that was later deleted by T&N, as explained in comment no. 17.)

⁹ Apart from this introductory sentence, the comment is identical to a comment to Terry and Naty's blog post of December 28, 2007; published on December 29, 2007, 20:30.

¹⁰ Why are some members of the CoP so annoyed that A stays anonymous? After all, A gives quite a few biographical information (Chilean, doctoral student, father of two children), more than some other readers-commentators – but, crucially, he is not aligned with others in orientation towards immigration as a daunting, but promising and exciting experience. Instead, his exposition of the negative view on his life circumstances in Quebec rather appears to others as the reason why he chooses anonymity. There are other incidents of anonymous commentators in our corpus; however, it seems that at least some of these are due to technical problems of the commentators, as some comments attest, where readers identify themselves in a subsequent comment. Also in this case analysis, comment no. 19 is posted as erroneously written by the wife of Gus Comas, who after noting this error immediately auto-identifies himself as author of comment no. 19.

Apart from the examples described above, the community's activities can be resumed as following: by and large, A's choice of words is criticised strongly and repeatedly by each commentator. For instance, comment no. 27 by Carlos Asenjo (15 de enero de 2008, 21:08) says, "la verdad es que muchas cosas de las que escribe el señor anonimo son muy ciertas. Aunque tal vez merezca mejor decirlas de manera menos vehemente y con mas calma." Moreover, some of A's expressions are reproduced as quotes, albeit with strong distancing from the arguments given. Quotes show that readers orientate themselves towards his arguments in order to refute them, but also whether a commentator has read the entire discussion and reflected on it, thus indexing the amount of time invested in the argument and the blog. Interestingly, as comment no. 27 also attests, some of A's arguments are taken up in the second half of the thread and discussed heatedly within the CoP. Commentators often concur with A's initial arguments (especially Quebec's dismal health system), but never fail to criticise his choice of words. Authors here go to great lengths to present themselves as balanced and respectful of other opinions. Topics are often introduced by reference to one's own personal experience (most often related to problems to find a gynecologist during pregnancy and of revalidation of academic titles). On the other hand, commentators shy away from A's arguments concerning other immigrant groups and visible minorities. In this respect, the role played by narratives as argumentative devices is very interesting: A typically argues by giving generalisations (e.g., *el sistema de salud es una mierda*), while the community tends to prove their point by referring to personal experiences in the sense of giving a *testimonio*. Of course, referring to one's own life inhibits others to contest a fact (since one is the expert of one's own life), but it also creates a certain closeness as telling others about one's life can be seen as a token of trust (entrusting others with personal informa-

tion) and thus enhancing the group's face as caring and supportive.

4. Conclusion

The question arises whether A really is a troll or not. As we saw, this is almost impossible to decide for sure since we have no information on A's intent when he posted his comments. It is unclear if he had the intent to deceive, or if he is – as is suggested by several members of the CoP – a very frustrated, solitary, bitter man who is rebuked even by other Latin American immigrants to Quebec. More important, however, is how A's comments are gradually taken up by the blogosphere and transformed into legitimate arguments worthy of discussion. It is precisely by publicly siding with T&N that shows that the entire CoP feels to be under attack and considers it necessary to address the issue. By siding with T&N, the CoP not only enhances the couple's face, but also updates on its own group identity (also cf. Bedijs, this volume, for a discussion of mechanisms of face enhancements). Face management is taking place by encouraging T&N in their immigration project and by portraying A as an outsider who is not to be taken seriously. Nevertheless, it is interesting to see that all commentators condemn A for his use of aggressive, racist and impolite choice of word, but that later comments in the discussion start to reframe some of his remarks and elaborate on them.

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Appendix 1: Number of comments, date, author of comment, and addressee of comment

No.	Date ¹¹	Terry & Naty	Anónimo	Other bloggers
Post	10.7.2007, 13:44	X		
1	11.7.2007, 12:36			Gus Comas
2	20.7.2007, 12:23			Juan Francisco
3	27.12.2007, 23:52		X	
4	28.12.2007, 12:32	X		
5	29.12.2007, 01: 10		X	
6	29.12.2007, 02:44		X	
7	29.12.2007, 10: 46	X		
8	29.12.2007, 17:05		X	
9	29.12.2007, 17:14		X	
10	30.12.2007, 02:55	X		
11	30.12.2007, 04:14		X	
12	30.12.2007, 14:30			Roberto Román (directed at A)
13	30.12.2007, 14:46			Roberto Román (directed at T&N)
14	30.12.2007, 15:36	X (response to nos. 12 and 13)		
15	30.12.2007, 17:14	X (response to A)		
16	30.12.2007, 17:38		X (deleted, according to no. 17)	

¹¹ Note that, due to differences in the time zones bloggers and readers are residing in, indications of dates can vary somewhat.

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			directed at T and Roberto Román)	
17	30.12.2007, 17:53	X (noting that no. 16 was deleted for foul language)		
18	30.12.2007, 21:18		X	
19	2.1.2008, 00:40			Mabel/Gus Comas
20	2.1.2008, 00:43			Gus Comas (identifying himself as author of no. 19, instead of his wife)
21	2.1.2008, 00:43			deleted – probably Gus, possibly identical to no. 20
22	7.1.2008, 22:37			Andres (first to label A a troll)
23	8.1.2008, 19:15			Andriana
24	9.1.2008, 07:18	X (response to nos. 22 and 23)		
25	14.1.2008, 00:08			Karina Valdéz
26	14.1.2008, 07:44	X (response to no. 25)		
27	15.1.2008, 21:08			Carlos Asenjo
28	18.1.2008, 03:14			Rosana

Bettina Kluge

29	10.2.2008, 00:10			LuisP
30	10.2.2008, 09:13	X (response to no. 29)		
31	20.2.2008, 00:26		X (directed at blogosphere)	
32	29.2.2008, 19:03			A1348058 (directed at A)
33	25.1.2009, 21:25			Angiel (directed at A1348058)
34	22.2.2009, 01:43			Anónimo2
35	22.2.2009, 02:44			Anónimo2

Linguistic Strategies for the Realisation of Face Work in Italian Tweets

1. Introduction

The Social Media communication platform Twitter was launched in 2006 and has grown exponentially since 2008 (cf. Marwick/Boyd 2010: 4). Nowadays, Twitter can be considered as the most popular micro-blogging platform (cf. Java et al. 2007: 3; cf. also Moraldo 2009: 249), replacing quite often email communication (cf. Crawford 2009: 526). The research focus of studies that have been carried out on the micro-blogging service covers a wide range of questions, for example the characteristics of the language use or the formal characteristics of messages posted to Twitter (*tweets*). Nevertheless, the accent of most of the studies is put on journalism, political communication and market communication via Twitter, and only few analyses concentrate on its role in private communication (cf. Tremayne 2007; Messner/Di Staso 2008; Park/Thelwall 2008; Keren 2009; Böhringer et al. 2009; Puschmann 2010; Schmidt 2011: 3). One of the few studies that are dedicated to personal communication via Twitter is the one carried out by Stefanone/Jang (2007). Furthermore, there do not exist many studies about Twitter communication in Romance languages; especially smaller languages such as Italian have not yet been studied in

depth. The aim of this article is to close this gap by analysing strategies of face work in Italian tweets.¹

Our research focus is laid on face work strategies due to the “multiple audience” (Marwick/Boyd 2010: 1) in Twitter communication. As “Tweets [...] are messages presented to a virtual audience who ‘follow’ by subscribing to another user’s feed [...]” (Zappavigna 2011: 3), users are never sure who will read their messages. In this sense, “Twitter [...] involves negotiating these multiple audiences to successfully maintain face and manage impressions” (Marwick/Boyd 2011: 145). The questions which we will try to answer in this paper are the following: which linguistic techniques do the users apply to handle the multiplicity regarding their addressees, and how do they specifically realise their face work with an imagined audience?

Our study is based on a corpus of 50 Italian, private tweets (without commercial purposes, accessible only for followers and therefore semi-public²), that have been collected (and chosen randomly within our corpus, nevertheless covering different topics) in May 2012. Our research is mainly based on the framework of politeness

¹ During the terminological discussions at the conference “Face Work and Social Media” which took place in May 2013 at Hildesheim University, the participants suggested alternative designations for the term *face work*. While some researchers prefer speaking about *relational work*, (cf. Locher/Watts 2008: 96) others highlight the function of *identity building* or of *social positioning of self and other* (cf. Bucholtz/Hall 2005: 586). As we do not have the space to go into detail concerning this terminological question, we keep the term *face work*, pointing out cross-references to the alternative concepts when describing the function of selected linguistic strategies throughout this article.

² This restriction means a limited degree of accessibility of the messages to the public which can result in a specific use of linguistic strategies and influence what kind of communicative activities are expected or considered as “normal”. On the other hand, different levels of openness to the public can determine which communicative behaviour is perceived as inappropriate and therefore sanctioned by the members of the discourse community.

and face work of Brown/Levinson.³ After a short discussion of the characteristics of Web 2.0 applications, the main communicative parameters and the functions of Twitter communication, we will reflect about the general role of face work in the micro-blogging service. This theoretical part of the paper is completed by a discussion of some selected examples (containing different categories of linguistic face work strategies) taken from the corpus.

2. Functions and communicative parameters of Twitter

In this chapter, we will briefly discuss the characteristics of the Web 2.0, the functions of the micro-blogging service Twitter, and central communicative parameters of the micro-blogging platform.

With Schmidt (2011: 2), we define blogs

[...] as frequently updated websites that display content in a reverse chronological order. Single blog entries ('postings') [...] can also usually be commented on by other users. Micro blogs usually impose a limit on the number of characters in a single posting: Twitter, the most prominent if not generic example of a micro blogging service, allows for 140 characters within one 'tweet'. Micro blogs can also rely on articulated social connections for the structuring of conversations and audiences, because other users explicitly establish connections amongst themselves by 'following' or 'being followed by' other users, and by explic-

³ As we suppose that our readers are familiar with the notions of face work and politeness strategies, we do not discuss the theoretical framework in depth in this article. For a more detailed summary of Brown and Levinson's approach, cf. Arendholz in this volume. Newer approaches discussing, for example, the concept(s) of (im)politeness, can be found in Bousfield 2010, Culpeper 2011 or Watts 2003, whereas Park/Thelwall 2008 focus their research on face-threatening acts in computer-mediated communication.

itly referring to other users by replying to or retweeting (i.e., 'retweeting') their postings. (Schmidt 2011: 2)

Twitter, as well as other forms of weblogs,

[...] [is] a prototypical application of the Social Web. They lower the barriers for participating in online conversations and the dissemination of information, blurring the basic dichotomy that is at the heart of traditional mass communication: the separation of roles between sender and receiver or between producers and users of information. (Cosh et al. 2008: 723)

Therefore, Twitter is part of the Web 2.0 as a form of reciprocal communication where users can directly react to and actively participate in the generation of contents. In this way, the Web 2.0 offers a new form of interactivity that puts the user in the center, with the users' power and influence rising considerably compared to the Web 1.0 (cf. Stanoevska 2008: 15; Moraldo 2009: 262).

When referring to the growth rates of Twitter as a micro-blogging platform, one has to discuss its advantages compared to "conventional" blogs as they existed long before the emergence of Twitter. This leads us to the discussion of the functions and the communicative parameters of Twitter communication, helping to distinguish it from face-to-face communication and from other forms of computer-mediated communication. The main argument seems to lie in the increase in speed of the communication, reducing the expenditure of time, and allowing at the same time to realise updates more frequently. One central communicative parameter that characterises Twitter communication is the semiotic code. Tweets are realised in the written code, with a reduced possibility of using non- and paraverbal resources. Nevertheless, tweets show some characteristics of spoken language on the conceptual level:

[...] dass sich viele der Kurznachrichten gerade im privaten Bereich an Mustern und Strukturen gesprochener Sprache orientieren. Tweets sind zwar textbasiert, also medial schriftlich, aber

das Spezifische der Kommunikation via Twitter ist ihre konzeptionelle Mündlichkeit, die einen hohen Grad an kommunikativer Nähe suggeriert. (Moraldo 2009: 267)

Further communicative parameters based on which Twitter communication can be classified are the medium (tweets are posted from desktop computers, laptops, mobile phones, smartphones or third party devices; the length of each message or tweet is 140 characters), the asynchronous character, e.g. the lack of co-presence of the users in time and space, the uni-directional character of the communication,⁴ and the number of interlocutors. Concerning this last aspect, we state that Twitter can be considered as *one-to-many*-communication (for a more detailed discussion, cf. the chapter about the multiplicity of addressees), or as a *many-to-many*-communication “through which individuals conceptualise an imagined audience evoked through their tweets” (Marwick/Boyd 2010: 1).

While in the early stages, Twitter users answered the question ‘What are you doing?’, the micro-blogging platform aims nowadays mainly at “[...] forming communities of shared value” (Zappavigna 2011: 1) and at the articulation of social connections. With Bucholtz and Hall (2005: 587), who state that identity “is intersubjectively rather than individually produced and interactionally emergent rather than assigned in an a priori fashion”, we highlight the importance of the interpersonal and relational aspects of Twitter communication. By following Bolander and Locher (this volume), we understand identity and identity building “as funda-

⁴ Despite of the growing use of Twitter as interactive, conversational form of communication (cf. Honeycutt/Herring 2009: 9), Twitter, in contrast to other forms of online communication (for example SMS communication), is not in all cases reciprocal and dialogic, as there is no necessity to react to a posted tweet, at least “no social expectation of such” (Marwick/Boyd 2010: 3). This can be explained by the fact that a tweet is not addressed to a few persons the user knows, but to a disperse audience (cf. Moraldo 2009: 266).

mentally in flux and shaped in interaction”, or, with other words, “identity on Twitter is constructed through conversations with others” (Marwick 2011: 7):

In other words, self-presentation is *collaborative*. Individuals work together to uphold preferred self-images of themselves and their conversation partners, through strategies like maintaining (or ‘saving’) face, collectively encouraging social norms, or negotiating power differentials and disagreements. (Marwick/Boyd 2010: 10)

As a consequence, strategies of face work become more and more important on Twitter, as they allow the user to avoid communicative problems in the context of community building and identity management. This means that users “[...] must formulate tweets and choose discussion topics based on imagined audience judgment” (Marwick/Boyd 2010: 11). As the number of addressees or followers is theoretically unlimited, this encourages the interlocutors to employ (more or less explicit) strategies of self-presentation or self-promotion. Marwick designates this phenomenon as “personal branding” and “self-commodification” (2011: 1).

To sum up, we state that it is mainly the “new” functions of the micro-blogging platform Twitter (identity management, community building and personal branding) that claim face work strategies.

3. The multiplicity of the addressees in Twitter communication and audience awareness

We have already mentioned that Twitter users never know exactly who will read their tweets, but that “they nevertheless have cer-

tain assumptions of their readership” (Schmidt 2011: 10).⁵ As a consequence, both the content as well as the form of the messages is adapted to this imagined or intended audience. The linguistic adaptation of the messages is what Schmidt designates as “audience awareness”: “Like many writers, bloggers write for a ‘cognitively constructed’ audience, an imagined group of readers who may not actually read the blog. [...] The imagined audience exists only as it is written into the text, through stylistic and linguistic choices” (Schmidt 2011: 11). However, the real or empirical audience might be different from this intended or addressed audience (cf. Schmidt 2011: 12):⁶

As in much computer-mediated communication, a tweet’s actual readers differ from its producer’s imagined audience. Twitter allows individuals to send private messages to people they follow through direct messages, but the dominant communication practices are public. [...] these tweets can be viewed by anyone through search.twitter.com [...]. (Marwick/Boyd 2010: 4)

It therefore becomes necessary to negotiate “[...] these multiple audiences to successfully maintain face and manage impressions” (Marwick/Boyd 2011: 145).

⁵ The difference between Twitter and SMS or email is that “the latter is primarily a directed technology with people pushing content to persons listed in the ‘To:’ field, while tweets are made available for interested individuals to pull on demand. The typical mail [and SMS] has an articulated audience, while the typical tweet does not” (Marwick/Boyd 2010: 7).

⁶ “Given the various ways people can consume and spread tweets, it is virtually impossible for Twitter users to account for their potential audience [...]. Yet, this inability to know the exact audience does not mean that tweets are seen by infinite numbers of people. [...] nearly all tweets are read by relatively few people – but most Tweepers do not know which few people. Without knowing the audience, participants imagine it” (Marwick 2010: 4).

4. Project outcomes

In this chapter, we will discuss different strategies of linguistic face work that can be observed in Italian tweets. Other strategies than linguistic ones (e.g., structural means such as retweets) are not taken into account. At the present, the quantitative analysis of face work strategies in our corpus is not yet finished. We applied a corpus-driven approach, and a first statistical approach reveals that the following five categories are frequently used in our corpus: hedging phenomena,⁷ metacommunication, questions to the audience, the expression of gratitude, and apologising. Mostly, these strategies can be considered as “[p]ositive comments [or reactions to previous tweets] [that] can express approval, sympathy, attention, interest or solidarity with the other. Negative comments, on the other hand, can be perceived as face-threatening and therefore tend to be mitigated in order to be socially acceptable” (Thaler, this volume). The strategies that we have identified in our corpus very often aim at realising positive face, a fact which can be explained by the users’ wish to promote themselves and to be accepted by the micro blogging community.

⁷ It is not always evident whether hedging phenomena have to be attributed to the realisation of the positive or the negative face. For Brown and Levinson, hedging phenomena are the expression of negative politeness, allowing saving the face both of the sender and of the addressee. For the presentation of the examples taken from the corpus, we took the context of the tweet into account in order to determine the function of this linguistic strategy. We furthermore have to deal with the double or even multiple labeling of linguistic strategies which can be assigned different functions, depending on the context of the virtual discussion; the form of the tweets may also be influenced by the real identity of the tweeters, meaning that besides the Twitter communication, they might interact in the “real world” (cf. Locher/Bolander, this volume). This methodological problem is a challenge for future research on online communication.

4.1. Hedging phenomena

In the analysed corpus, users frequently employ hedging strategies. Hedging reflects the linguistic presence of an author in an utterance who expresses their uncertainty or their doubts, in this way complying with the language and culture-specific conventions of politeness in the respective online discourse traditions. The promotion of one's meaning in the context of Social Media communication bears a particular risk of face loss, so the users tend to present themselves as careful when they express conclusions drawn from real-life events or from foregoing tweets. In contemporary research, hedging phenomena are mostly analysed in discourse analysis, speech act theory and pragmatics where its core function is described as the "qualification and toning-down of utterances or statements [...] in order to reduce the riskiness of what one says" (Wales 1989). Lindeberg claims that "[a]ny [knowledge] claim can be potentially face-threatening and is therefore often phrased in a tentative way for reasons of politeness and caution" (Lindeberg 1997: 695). The main motivation for using hedging phenomena is the "mitigation of what may otherwise seem to forceful may be one reason; politeness or respect to strangers or superiors to another" (Wales 1989).

The hedging devices discussed below serve the authors to minimise the risk of a loss of credibility should their point of view be falsified by other members of the Twitter community. The use of the hedging devices may be the result of genuine uncertainty about the validity of the conclusion, of an apprehension of coming criticism for putting forth this conclusion, or of an apprehension of future falsification by their followers.

In a certain number of tweets, the Tweeters use tentative verbs (*sembrare* and *parere* ('seem')), pointing out that the (positive or

negative) criticism regarding a previous tweet is based on their individual competence.

The examples (1) to (5) illustrate the use of tentative verbs:⁸

- (1) **Mi sembra** decisivo capire se il #movimento5stelle vuole uscire dall'euro. Ma #putti non ha dato risposta chiara #omnibus

It seems decisive to me to understand if #movimento5stelle wants to leave the euro. But #putti has not yet given a clear answer #omnibus

- (2) @Nowandthen appunto. Ma ora non **sembrano** esserci alternative, ed e' su quello che conta #monti

@Nowandthen exactly. But at the moment, there seems to be no alternative, and it is these alternatives that #monti counts on

- (3) @SalvatoreMerlo @PierluigiBattis ha **in parte** smentito (in effetti non aveva usato il termine suicidi) ma **mi sembra** una risposta legittima

@SalvatoreMerlo @PierluigiBattis has partly disclaimed (in fact he had not used the word suicide), but to me, it seems to be a legitimate answer

- (4) #newtwitter sono d'accordo con la maggior parte di voi, **mi sembra** ben fatto e non vedo l'ora di provarlo

#newtwitter I share the opinion of most of you, it seems to be well done to me, and I can't wait to try it

- (5) #hollande puo' rinegoziare il #fiscalcompact, ma il six pack e' gia' in vigore. Quindi **mi pare** si tratti soprattutto di demagogia.

#hollande he can renegotiate the #fiscalcompact, but the six pack is already in force. So it seems to me as if this was mainly demagogic

Besides tentative verbs, we identified the modal verb (*potere* ('can')) in the corpus. In example (6), the author of the tweet hides behind their comment by combining two hedging strategies. On the one hand, they use the impersonal *si* ('one'), and combine it

⁸ In the discussed examples, the relevant linguistic strategies are highlighted in bold face. This typographic accentuation does not appear in the original tweets as they are found in our corpus.

with the conditional form of the modal verb *potere* ('could'). Using the modal verb *potere*, the author of the tweet makes explicit that they consider their conclusion just as an option among others ('one could say that [...]'), being aware that there exist alternative ways of interpreting facts:

- (6) @GiovanniCocconi i soldi prima delle notizie, **si potrebbe dire**. Ma l'hanno fatto in tanti...

@GiovanniCocconi Money is more important than the news, one could say. But so many have done it...

Another strategy to weaken a claim in Italian tweets is the use of the verb *credere* ('believe'), which is combined with the negation of the verb *sapere* ('know') in example (7) ('I don't know, I think that [...]):

- (7) @rsdsorriso **non lo so, credo** sia una chiacchieraata generale, esodati, riforma pensioni ecc.

@rsdsorrisoni I don't know, I think that this is a general blabber, reform of the pensions etc.

The author of the tweet represented in example (8) underlines that the opinion expressed in the tweet is based on their personal point of view. By using a prepositional phrase ('To me, this is a mystery because [...]), they do not claim that their point of view should be adopted by the Twitter community:

- (8) **Per me** e' un mistero perche' la stampa italiana non si occupa del caso di #BoXilai

To me, this is a mystery because the Italian press does not deal with the case #BoXilai

The degree of certainty can also be downgraded when authors add adverbs such as *forse* ('perhaps') to their claims:

- (9) #amato e' persona degna. Ma uno che stava con craxi ai bei tempi **forse** non era la persona più adatta a occuparsi di finanziamento ai partiti

Nadine Rentel

#amato is an equal person. But someone who was with craxi in the good times perhaps this was not the best person to deal with the fundraising of political parties

The author of example (10) reduces the validity of their claim by using a conditional clause (*Se ho capito bene*. 'If I got it right/If I understood well'):

(10) **Se ho capito bene** la #fornero dice che non hanno avuto tempo di calcolare gli effetti della riforma dell'#articolo18

If I understood well, la #fornero says that they did not have the time to think about the effect of the impacts of the #articolo18

In the last example we want to discuss in the chapter of hedging strategies, the user downgrades their doubt about the authenticity of a Twitter account with the adjective *piccolo* ('small/little') ('I have a little doubt on [...]'):

(11) anche @Four_P: ci segnala @fabiocannavaro (**io ho un piccolo dubbio** sull'autenticità dell'account)

also @Four_P: we want to signal @fabiocannavaro (I have a little doubt on the authenticity of the account)

4.2. Metacommunication

In the following examples, Twitter users make explicit meta-communicative comments on the ongoing conversation and the facts discussed in the tweets. In many cases, they apply this strategy, rectifying or explaining the intention of their tweet, in order to avoid misunderstandings:

(12) #monti "**non ho parlato di suicidi ma** di conseguenze umane della crisi"

#monti "I did not talk about suicide but about the human consequences of the crisis"

- (13) **Per chiarire:** per #monti la linea della crescita in europa da seguire NON e' quella di #hollande. Si cresce con l'offerta, non col deficit

Just to clarify it: for #monti the strategy of growth to follow in Europe is NOT the one of #hollande. We can grow with the offer, not with the deficit

Both examples (12) and (13) concern the designation level, with the Tweeters discussing the appropriate lexical choice in order to describe a real world event. In example (12), the user underlines that they did not speak of suicide (*suicidi*) in a previous tweet, but of the human consequences of the (financial) crisis (*conseguenze umane della crisi*). It seems that one of their followers misinterpreted the preceding tweet. In order to save their face, and at the same time the face of the follower, the user explains the intention of their tweet (*Non ho parlato di [...]*. 'I did not talk about [...]'). In example (13), the author uses the explicit metacommunicative formula *per chiarire* ('to clarify'), underlining the correct way of interpreting a fact.

In examples (14) to (16), the Twitter user underlines that they are of the same opinion as one of their followers, granting them positive face. By means of this strategy, the Tweeter promotes, on the one hand, their positive self-image, and expresses that they appreciate the personality of the follower on the other hand. Granting expert status to themselves as well as to their partner allows them to realise the core function of community building and identity management on Twitter. It is important to state that the following examples are addressed directly to another user, which is marked by the "@". Compared to the tweets discussed above which are addressed to a multiple audience, the fact of directly addressing one person reduces the potential audience:

- (14) @InductivistTurkquesta **e' una giusta osservazione**, e' pericoloso in questo momento dire che solo il lavoro da' dignita'

@InductivistTurkquesta this is a right observation, in this moment, it is dangerous to say that it is only the work granting dignity to a person

(15)@mausassieh, la stessa cosa che ho pensato anche io. Ma alfano non lo so

@mausassieh *I thought the same. But alfano I don't know*

(16)@StefanoCeccanti sono **d'accordo**, e' una cosa assurda. Su questo nessuna differenza tra berlusconiani e tecnici

@StefanoCeccanti *okay, this is a strange thing. In this context, there is no difference between Berlusconi and the technicians*

In the examples cited above, the author of a tweet indicates that their interlocutor made a correct observation (ex. (14): *questa è una giusta osservazione*), that they were thinking the same (ex. (15): *la stessa cosa che ho pensato anche io*), and that they are of the same opinion (ex. (16): *sono d'accordo*).

In example (17), the user tries to keep their face, by claiming that they do not take part in any kind of speculations (ex. (17): *non partecipo alle speculazioni*), pointing out their moral integrity. In example (18), they criticise one of their followers who did not respect the politeness conventions of conversation (*non ti hanno insegnato a dire per piacere?* 'Did no one teach you to say please?'). This is one of the rare examples of potential face-threatening acts in our corpus. In example (19), the author tries to avoid face loss by applying humor, stating that their followers should take them as they are (ex. (19): *prendetemi come sono se mi volete bene*), and asking their followers not to blame them (ex. (20): *non date la colpa solo a me*). These examples reflect the Tweeters' concern of being accepted by the community:

(17)La #merkel: **non partecipo alle speculazioni** su monti all'eurogruppo

#merkel: *I do not take part in speculations on monti in the Eurogroup*

(18)@CESARECROSIGNAN nn ti hanno insegnato a dire "per piacere"? :)) buona fortuna a te cesare

@CESAREGROSIGNAN *has no one taught you to say "thank you"? Good luck to you, cesare*

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(19)@igorrisani io sono io. prendetemi come sono se mi volete bene :)

@igorrisani I am as I am. Take me as I am if you want to be nice to me

(20)per ora direi 95% danno l'Italia vincente. **poi non date la colpa solo a me ;)**

at the moment, I would say that 95% estimate that Italy will win. So do not blame only me

In the last two examples, the Twitter user asks their followers to excuse their silence. They try to explain the fact that they did not tweet for a time period because of a high workload (*scusate ma ieri non ho potuto twittare* ('Sorry, but yesterday, I did not have the time to post anything on Twitter'); *qui si lavora tanto e si twitta poco. Mi perdonerete* ('A lot of work needs to be done here; this is why I cannot tweet very often. Please forgive me.')):

(21)mi sono svegliata adesso grazie dei bei commenti **scusate ma ieri non ho potuto twittare :))**

I just woke up thanks for the nice comments sorry but yesterday I could not tweet

(22)qui si lavora tanto e si twitta poco. **mi perdonerete**

we have a lot of work here, and we cannot tweet a lot. Excuse me

In tweets of this kind, the author shows that they are concerned about their positive self-image, underlining that they know and respect the unwritten rules of the communication on a micro-blogging platform, concerning the reciprocal and relational character of the exchange. Furthermore, they express their appreciation for their followers by not making them wait too long for a reply.

4.3. Questions to the audience

In some tweets, the users ask their audience questions. This strategy is used for different face saving purposes. In example (23), the user likes to have some kind of feedback from their followers,

asking them if they liked something (*Vi è piaciuto? Cerco feedback.* 'Did you like it? I need some feedback.'). while the user in example (24) wants to know the opinion of the audience concerning a new twitter service (*Che ne pensate?* 'What do you think about it?'). By asking this question, they show that they appreciate the point of view (the expertise) of the community, granting their members positive face:

- (23) il libro #marchionnemente allegato col #fattoquotidiano l'avete comprato? **Vi e' piaciuto?** Cerco feedback.

did you buy the book #marchionnemente linked to #fattoquotidiano? Did you like it? I am looking for some feedback.

- (24) avete sbirciato il nuovo twitter? **Che ne pensate?**

Have you had a peek at the new twitter? What do you think about it?

- (25) **Che dite**, lo facciamo oggi il #pronostico #ita #slo? Io evito :P

What do you say, should we do it today, the #pronostico #ita #slo?

- (26) **finito di mangiare?** aggiungi anche il tuo #pronostico #ita #Nzl Li stiamo raccogliendo qua <http://ow.ly/20Pph>

Have you finished eating? Add also your #pronostico #ita #Nzl We are about to collect them here

In example (26), the author wants to know if their followers have finished eating (*Finito di mangiare?*). They are very polite, asking their interlocutor before starting or continuing the conversation. The example also shows how strongly interrelated online communication and virtual identity on the one hand and the "real world identity" may be: while the communication takes place in the virtual world, the fact of having a meal belongs to the real world.

4.4. Expressing gratitude

Another verbal strategy, aiming at saving one's face, consists in expressing gratitude to one's followers:

(27) @maudilucchio **grazie**

@maudilucchio thank you

(28) #Buongiorno a tutti e buon giorno @tvblog e **grazie del sostegno** <3

#Buongiorno to everyone and hello @tvblog and thank you for the support

(29) #FF a tutti quelli che mi seguono. oggi siamo a 250mila! **grazie grazie di cuore**<3

#FF to all those who follow me. Today we are 250 000! Thank you, thank you very much

(30) @nunziapenelope **grazie a te**. piacere di conoscerti ora ti seguo :)

@nunziapenelope thank you. It was a pleasure to know you. From now on, I follow you

(31) **Un grande ringraziamento** a @pandemia che nel suo libro "comunicare con twitter" ha segnalato TwitterItalia.it

Big thanks to @pandemia who in her book "how to communicate on Twitter" has signaled TwitterItalia.it

This is realised in a very standardised form, by using the expression *grazie* ('Thanks'), the verb *ringraziare* ('to thank someone') or the noun *ringraziamento* ('thank'). With the expression of gratitude, Tweeters express their appreciation towards their followers, aiming at intensifying the process of community building.

It is interesting to note that the speech act of expressing gratitude seems to underlie significant intercultural differences between cultures in Southern Europe, in face-to-face communication as well as in online communication. While thanking another person explicitly occurs quite often in the Italian culture (which can be confirmed by our empirical analysis), speakers of Spanish make less use of these expressions in everyday communication (cf. Hickey 2005: 320). Nevertheless, this tendency has to be confirmed for Twitter communication by carrying out systematic, contrastive research.

4.5. Apologising

In the case of having tweeted a link that does not work, or in case of technical problems affecting the conversation, Twitter users apologise for the inconvenience (ex. (36): *Scusate per il disagio e grazie a chi ha segnalato i problemi*. 'Sorry for the inconveniences and thanks to the follower who indicated the problem.'). In example (35), the user apologises for them being late due to technical problems (*scusate il ritardo non mi funzionava internet*. 'Sorry for this delay, but my internet did not work.'). In this tweet, the user highlights that the relationship between them and their followers is in no way at risk:

(32) **Mi sono perso** \$ #giarda sta parlando della repubblica cisalpina.

I am a bit lost #giarda is talking about the repubblica cisalpina

(33) @ErwanKerzanet @ilmanifesto2012 ciao **scusa** sai che non ho capito... che vuol dire?

@ErwanKerzanet @ilmanifesto2012 hello excuse me you know that I did not understand... what do you want to say?

(34) @aureliomancuso be' mi era sfuggito allora **scusa**

@aureliomancuso well, so I missed that, sorry

(35) #buongiorno scusate il ritardo nn mi funzionava internet

#buongiorno sorry for the delay my internet did not work

(36) <http://www.twitteritalia.it> è tornata a funzionare **grazie** a @thecocce
Scusate per il disagio e **grazie** a chi ci ha segnalato i problemi

*<http://www.twitteritalia.it> is back and works for free thanks to @thecocce
sorry for the inconveniences and thanks for the person who signaled this problem*

In most of the recent studies on face work, the speech act of "apologising" is considered as a strategy to avoid face-threatening acts (cf. Park/Guan 2006). Nevertheless, one has to differentiate the results, at least at two levels. First of all, it seems to play a crucial

role *when* and under *which conditions* the apology occurs in a verbal exchange. The research literature differs between apologies given freely by someone who is “willing to acknowledge ineptitude” (Hodgins/Liebeskind 2003: 298) and apologies that are expected by the discourse community. In the second case, offenders who do not apologise will feel the social consequences of their behaviour. So, as Hodgins and Liebeskind (2003: 309) state, apology given during predicaments is viewed favourable and can help avoiding face-threatening acts: “Apology has the almost miraculous ability to reconcile people as if an event had not occurred [...]” (Hodgins/Liebeskind 2003: 314). As we don’t know the complete context of the single tweets in our corpus, we can only state the hypothesis that it seems that most of the apologies are given freely by the users (as they mainly concern “harmless” predicaments such as twittering a false link). The second aspect concerns the fact that the function of apologies in the context of face work is culture-specific. While apologising can be considered as restoring face work in some cultures, in others, it does not play the same role. To sum up, the interpretation of the function of apologising has to be judged extremely carefully.

5. Conclusion and outlook

Our empirical study of Italian tweets shows that Twitter users employ different linguistic strategies for “doing” face work on the micro-blogging platform. The focus of our study lies on the qualitative analysis of selected face work strategies, and we state that Tweeters use them mainly for the purpose of relation building and identity management. Explicit strategies of boasting and self-branding can be found less frequently.

In the context of relational work, we observe a high frequency of hedging strategies.⁹ Under hedging strategies in the Italian Twitter corpus, we subsume certain tentative verbs, such as *sembrare*, *parere* ('seem'), *credere* ('think; believe'), the modal verb *potere* ('can'), adverbs like *forse* and *magari* ('perhaps'), or more complex formula of modesty (*Se ho capito bene*. 'If I got it right.'), in order to weaken a criticism. Adjectives like *piccolo* ('small; little') also serve to weaken a user's claim or criticism.

Another linguistic strategy consists in metacommunication, which manifests itself in the corpus in forms of comments with direct reference to previous tweets. By means of these metalinguistic comments, users rectify or explain the intention of their tweet, in order to avoid misunderstandings and to keep their face (or the face of their interlocutor). In our Italian corpus, metacommunication also aims at relation building on Twitter, when one user claims that they share the same point of view as their interlocutor, granting their positive face. A third function of metacommunication strategies consists in informing the addressees about the reasons of a communicative absence. In tweets of this type, users often apologise for not having tweeted for a certain period of time because they know that Twitter is a quasi-synchronous form of communication, not allowing too long intervals between two turns.

Besides hedging phenomena and metacommunication, users in our Italian Twitter corpus ask their followers explicit questions for "doing" face work. On the one hand, they claim their followers' feedback on certain contents and opinions, in order to know whether they share their point of view. Usually, they attribute their followers the status of an expert by asking those types of

⁹ Nevertheless, we have to take into account the methodological problem of double labeling, concerning the functional classification of linguistic means in our corpus.

questions. On the other hand, asking questions aims at being polite when respecting the addressees' activities and needs outside the micro-blogging platform, in the "real world". Before posting a tweet, and before invading into their followers' real life activities, users may ask for permission, signaling that they respect their privacy and their right of personal freedom which they do not want to restrict with any kind of communicative activity.

We close the discussion of face work strategies in our Italian Twitter corpus by referring to two further phenomena: the expression of gratitude towards the community, and apologising. Users quite often apologise when they have posted an incorrect link or when technical problems have occurred in a previous tweet, as this may have caused inconveniences to their followers. By using this strategy, they show their general esteem for their addressees. Furthermore, they do not want to put at risk their self-image as experts in a certain domain.

Our empirical analysis has shown that users apply different linguistic techniques to handle the multiplicity regarding their addressees and in order to realise the face work with this imagined audience. The analysis of tweets addressed to selected users indicates that the strategies used in the context of a multiple audience do not differ from the linguistic phenomena used in messages dedicated to the totality of the followers. As our database is composed of tweets that are only accessible to a limited numbers of followers (semi-public), it will be interesting to investigate whether Twitter messages addressed to an unlimited number of recipients contain varying linguistic means for realising face work. A statistical analysis, based on a corpus-based approach which will allow an exhaustive classification of linguistic face work strategies on Twitter has to remain open for future studies.

As it has been mentioned in the introduction of this paper, we did not take into account other languages than Italian. By analysing

one single language, we do not claim that our results can be considered as universal for Twitter communication. In order to describe language- and culture-specific characteristics of Twitter communication, more empirical analyses are needed.

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Part IV

FACE IN EXPERTS AND LAYPEOPLE COMMUNICATION IN SOCIAL MEDIA

Subject Emergence, Self-Presentation, and Epistemic Struggle in French Language Forums

1. Introduction

The initial point of this article is the concept of face work and its compatibility with characteristics of internet communication with special focus on the French forum *Français notre belle langue*. The study is part of a larger research project on online folk linguistics and knowledge exchange in Romance languages where the main concerns are (folk-)linguistic production and transmission. In this article, we focus on the relation between folk linguistics, knowledge transmission, subject emergence, and face work. The study is introduced by theoretical reflections on Goffman's *face* concept in times of computer-mediated communication. Given the characteristics of internet forum communication, we propose alternative notions such as *self-presentation* and *ethos* in order to come to grips with the specific conditions of this type of communication. The focus on self-presentation leads to a wider reflection on *subject* and *subject emergence* in knowledge interchange and, specifically, in assertions as one of the central speech acts we will examine here. The polyphony theory of Ducrot (1984) and related work such as Amossy (2010) will supply the necessary theoretical framework. On the basis of the theoretical assumptions in the first part of the

article, in its second part we will analyse selected utterances in the above mentioned internet forum. The aim of our analysis is to gain some empirical insight into different strategies of self-presentation in the mentioned communicative medium. Due to the pioneer character of this article, the analysis comprises selected and representative examples and a specific focus on the main problems of self-presentation in knowledge oriented internet forums without the pretension of giving an exhaustive account of the whole spectrum of self-presentation strategies in internet forum discussion.

2. Face, face work, and politeness in internet communication

Social Media communication is a fairly new kind of interaction distinct from direct oral encounters and from (more) traditional forms of written and/or mediated communication. It is mainly determined by the dissociation from face-to-face communication and the construction of media-based social groups (Sutter/Mehler 2010: 7), a concept which substitutes that of speech-community¹ in non-virtual environments. As to the following considerations, one of the crucial internet communication characteristics that challenge politeness-based face-notions and face work theory is the linguistic peculiarity of communication in Social Media paired with the anonymity of the interaction participants and the virtuality of their identity. Communication in internet forums is but one example of distinct discourse traditions that are arising in internet-based com-

¹ Notably, the concept of speech-community is also falling into disuse because of being incongruent with the new forms of globalised and superdiverse realities out of which new kinds of identity constitution are emerging (cf. Rampton 2006; Blommaert/Rampton 2011). These are in direct relation to language use and identity claims that appear in internet communication.

munication. The particular properties of forum communication, determined as an internet subgenre (Varga 2011) or, as proposed here, as one of several existing internet communication forms (or even emerging internet discourse traditions), seem to be in opposition to the face concept introduced by Goffman (1967) – needless to say that his insights in the rules of social behaviour originate from pre-internet-based communication forms. It is mainly the absence of face-to-face interaction that distinguishes internet communication from what Goffman was talking about. Within internet communication in general and internet forum interaction in particular, interaction participants don't need to show their face – the meaning of which goes far beyond the mere fact that they do not meet nor see each other: It facilitates constructions of virtual face(s) that may be in contradiction to perceptions which in real, i.e. physical encounters, contribute to face construction like, for example, physical properties and dressing style.

Since Brown's and Levinson's (1987) very controversially discussed theory, face has become one of the central notions related to politeness, politeness theory and research. The main focus of (theoretical) interest has moved from strategies of self-image to an orientation towards strategies directed to the face of ALTER. Quite a large number of studies have been realised since, mainly equating face work with politeness and highlighting intercultural differences between positive and negative face. The more or less implicit focus on the construction of the (cultural) ALTER, contributes to a lack of research focusing on self-face strategies. This is only part of the (recent) criticism of the Brown/Levinson theory on politeness (Frank 2011: 84). The lack of attention to the speaker's self-oriented face work probably is related to concepts and definitions of politeness. As especially the Spanish tradition of its research indicates, politeness is not defined as a self-directed behaviour or, the other way around, what seems to be self-oriented *face work* is not sup-

posed to be politeness and thus is rarely taken into consideration (Abelda 2005: 345); instead, politeness is defined in terms of benefit of face work for ALTER.

As our study deals with a completely different (and new) communicative situation than those explored by Goffman, Brown/Levinson or others, our focus on face work will be mainly on self-oriented face work. This is also due to our hypothesis concerning communication in internet forums, where we observe a priority of self-oriented face work, which might even include spontaneous ALTER-oriented face work strategies in support of the face of EGO (cf. Amossy 2011).

3. Self-presentation, *ethos*, and the notion of subject in knowledge transmission in internet forum communication

3.1. Knowledge production, self-presentation, and ethos

3.1.1. Folk linguistics and knowledge generation

As mentioned in our introductory section, the production and transmission of knowledge in the internet forum *Français notre belle langue* will be ascribed to the linguistic research area of folk linguistics (Niedzielski/Preston 2003).² The special communicative conditions suggest the denomination as online folk linguistics. As the work of Varga (2011) shows, knowledge is generally an important aspect of internet communication concerning vastly different knowledge domains such as medical knowledge, juridical knowl-

² For a different take on face work in language internet forums cf. Kunkel in this volume.

edge, technical knowledge, etc. Linguistic knowledge as one of these domains is a diversified and important part of knowledge production and management in internet communication which so far has generated different internet communication forms such as forums, blogs, Youtube videos, translation platforms, and online language courses. Before focusing on folk-linguistic knowledge production and management in internet forums, two fundamental questions remain to be discussed: one refers to the concept of knowledge and its definition, the other one concerns the subject of knowledge production and transmission which in folk linguistics leads to the distinction between novice (layperson) and expert.

Knowledge is a much-discussed concept which lacks a single and unique definition. Our take on the concept is founded in social-cognitive theory: based on recent neurophysiological findings, knowledge has to be thought of as a dynamic memory-based process of the human brain consisting of the continuous interlinking of synapses triggered decisively by social and verbal interaction (cf. Solso 2005). The process of generating knowledge is bound to verbal interaction and the place where it is negotiated is discourse: here it becomes manifest and accessible for verification, diffusion, for others and not least for analysis.

The first instance to generate knowledge is the speaker – be it more or less specialised knowledge or more or less folk knowledge. Following the theoretical assumptions of Achard-Bayle and Paveau (2008), a continuum between the poles of folk linguistics and expert linguistics (proper linguistics in a more narrow sense) can be supposed. This permits gradual speaker classification between the poles of novice (layperson) and expert. The grade of expertise in linguistic knowledge is evaluated not only according to the kind of knowledge and its transmission but also according to the empirical speaker subject. Achard-Bayle/Paveau (2008) discuss this aspect with respect to contextual information available

about the speaker who is claiming expertise: In order to classify the speaker as novice (layperson) or expert, for example, the researcher's knowledge about the speaker's professional background is taken into consideration. There might be, for example, some discussion on the respective classification of a teacher to be situated somewhere in the middle of the continuum with a tendency to the right pole, that means somewhere between novice (layperson) and expert, but closer to the expert than to the novice (layperson). As is obvious, this classification refers to real speaking subjects in a real world.

However, for our purposes a different access to folk-linguistic speaker classification as layperson or expert is necessary and possible. As shown before, we need to dissociate ourselves from the idea of an empirical speaker subject which provides us with implicit information about themselves (such as their professional background) and focus on utterances in texts in order to track the verbal signs that indicate subject emergence and access to subjective self-presentation. What are forms of self-presentation of subjects while communicating about language in an internet forum? Are there differences in presentation of self in the speaker's discourse that can be related to the speaker's properties as expert or novice? Is the speaking subject claiming an expert self and if so, how do they do it?

These questions point to a different access to self-presentation we will use here in order to analyse strategies of self-presentation in folk-linguistic internet forum communication: It is not the question of strategies of face work discussed in politeness theory such as positive face and negative face that are in the focus of the following analysis but the question of how the speaking subject presents his self or her self in order to negotiate knowledge in internet forum discussions.

3.1.2. Self-presentation, ethos, and subjectivity in forum language

Even though in the discussions in the internet forum we are examining here, we will find different types of speech acts, our focus is exclusively on assertions. This is due to our subject, the generation and transmission of knowledge, and the supposition that these communicative activities are realised within assertive acts. The general perlocutive aim of assertive acts as they are realised in the internet forum *Français notre belle langue* can be defined as a special kind of persuasion: Virtual speakers seek to persuade their virtual interlocutors of the validity of their (folk-)linguistic knowledge. As Ducrot (1984) works out, generally, persuasion can be based on different argumentative strategies. As our topic is self-presentation within verbal knowledge transmission activities, we will focus on the Aristotelian concept of *ethos*, which is part of the rhetoric of Aristotle and refers to one of the argumentative means of persuasion. Meanwhile *logos* refers to the argument itself, i.e., the influence that a speaker tries to have on their interlocutor by presenting a 'good' argumentation with respect to the content of their arguments and the structure of their argumentation, *ethos* refers to the strengthening of argumentation by presenting the speaker's authority and/or identity as a competent, reliable, and credible interlocutor (cf. Ducrot 1984; Amossy 2010). The principal idea is that *ethos* is an inherent part of any discourse: In any communicative act, speakers realise (implicit or explicit) acts of self-presentation as authentic and trustworthy persons. Amossy (2011) shows by means of literature examples, that even in fictional texts one may observe an author's/speaker's construction of *ethos*.

As discussed before in relation to Goffman's face-theory, one of the features of internet forum discussion is that it is characterised and distinguished by the lack of an empirical speaker subject. *Ethos* thus has to be constructed exclusively by means of language, no contextual devices can be used. Therefore our analysis has to be

focused on verbal expressions of subjectivity in the utterances within the postings that constitute internet forum interaction. The expression of subjectivity in language is a much-discussed topic in cognitive linguistics closely related to linguistic research areas such as that of modality and evidentiality.³ For the purposes of our analysis we will center our interest mainly – though not exclusively – on verbal means of expression of evidentiality and interpret them as manifestations of self-presentation. That means that we will pay special attention to the various ways in which a speaker subject establishes a relation between their self and the transmitted knowledge by marking the source of knowledge in assertive speech acts. By means of expressions of evidentiality, speakers often not only introduce various sources of knowledge they rely on, but thereby indicate various subjects committed to the reliability of the knowledge and thus make their discourse polyphonic. As we intend to show in our analysis, subjectivity emerges, for example, by the use of deictic pronouns but also by the various ways to express different voices in discourse that are related explicitly and implicitly to the source of the transmitted knowledge. We will establish a relation between these expressions of subjectivity and the aspect of self-presentation and *ethos* construction. For that purpose we rely on the polyphony theory of Ducrot (1984) and further work that relates to argumentation theory (cf. Atayan 2006a; 2006b) and self-presentation (Amossy 2011).

Our theoretical background has consequences for the terminology to be used in our analysis. According to Ducrot (1984), a distinction will be made between the empirical speaker subject, the *locuteur* and the *énonciateur*.⁴ The empirical speaker subject, a notion we already introduced in the preceding sections, refers to the

³ For a very recent survey of this topic cf. Narrog 2012.

⁴ In order to prevent misunderstandings due to problems of translation into English, we will stick mainly to the French terminology.

speaker as a real physical person in a real physical world. As mentioned before, we part from the supposition that there is hardly access to the empirical speaker subject, neither from a forum discussion participant perspective nor from the vantage point of the analysing linguist. As will be shown in our analysis, this supposition which points to the fundamental question of the relation between internet forum communication and its impact on reality (cf. also Schrader-Kniffki 2012), has restricted validity.

According to Ducrot (1984) we will define as *locuteur* (L) the discursive instance that emerges as committed to and responsible for the utterance and its content. As Ducrot (1984: 193) emphasises, different *locuteurs* may be identifiable in discourse. This is the case, for example, with reported speech. Thus, at this point we can establish the mentioned relation between polyphony and linguistic evidentiality theory. The introduction of different *locuteurs* points to one type of expression of evidentiality, the so called 'quotative' or 'hearsay source', and can be situated at the interface between evidentiality research and polyphony theory. Ducrot (1994) denominates this *locuteur* as *locuteur* λ . In his cognitive-pragmatic approach to subjectivity, Nuyts (2001) determines expressions of evidentiality as markers of an emerging subject in discourse. Thus these expressions of evidentiality can be interpreted as the emergence of a *locuteur* λ and, as mentioned before, may lead us to an understanding of the specific kind of self-presentation of the subject in discourse.

However, discourse consists of different voices, some of which are not identifiable as *locuteurs* but are being ascribed to a more subtle appearance. Ducrot (1984) calls them *énonciateurs*. These are 'discursive beings' (diskursive Wesen, cf. Gévaudan 2008: 4), like background voices which remain implicit in certain types of utterances; the concept of the *énonciateur* may be related to Grice's pre-

supposition concept: a negation, for example, implicitly presupposes an *énonciateur* responsible for the affirmation of its content.

4. Self-presentation and ethos in the internet forum *Français notre belle langue*

4.1. The internet forum ‘Français notre belle langue’ and corpus construction

As mentioned before, the virtual data basis for our corpus construction is the vast quantity of postings in the internet forum *Français notre belle langue*. Our corpus, however, consists of a selection of assertive utterances which we think to be representative for showing a certain scope of different self-presentation strategies in forum discussion. As it is meant to be an exemplary study, no quantitative specifications will be made. For the purposes of our analysis, thematic aspects of the selected threads are not decisive: notably, there is some thematic eclecticism in our thread selection. This is due to our main concern about variation of self-presentation strategies in the postings’ respective utterances.

4.2. Instances of self-presentation: selected examples

4.2.1. *Implicit subjects, authority-based argumentation, and self-presentation*

As mentioned before, knowledge production (in the forum) is realised by means of assertive speech acts as the following example shows. The posting belongs to the thematic thread “Locution

adverbiale et adverbès” (‘adverbal locutions and adverbs’) and stands for an example of a statement:

Une locution est un groupe de mots, un adverbe, un simple mot. Il existe des locutions verbales, adverbiales, conjonctives, interjectives, prépositives. (FNBL3)

As there is no expression of a grammatical subject, the posting can be characterised by the absence of an explicit *locuteur*; nor is there an explicit addressee: it is an assertion the *locuteur* identifies their self completely with and which is presented to an implicit and virtual addressee. Going along with Amossy (2010), we suppose that in verbal interaction there is no assertion uttered without committing an act of self-presentation. Thus, even if we don’t find an explicit *locuteur* and even considering the relative anonymity of the participants of internet forum discussions, we have to suppose a *locuteur* which by manifesting their knowledge commits an act of self-presentation. There have to be indications that permit us to identify the self-presentation strategy of this *locuteur*.

At the beginning of the section we introduced this utterance as a ‘statement’: the *locuteur* presents their knowledge within an assertive act not open to scrutiny. This interpretation is based on the observation of the use of the copula *est* and the presentative construction *il existe* which together with the enumeration of items generate a high degree of factuality and point to the validity of the transmitted knowledge. However, the verbal encoding of the knowledge evokes a discourse of normative grammar writing. We suppose that the *locuteur* introduces a normative *énonciateur* and constructs his *ethos* by authority (cf. Ducrot 1984). They present their self as an expert in text type knowledge, an owner of factual linguistic knowledge and with the right to claim the intersubjective validity of linguistic normative knowledge.

This kind of factual utterance can often be found in postings at the beginning of a new thematic thread or as a way to come to an end

with longer internet forum discussions.⁵ However, there is gradual variation within this type of utterances as may be shown in the utterance we present next. It is part of a thread called “Les faux amis de la syntaxe française” (‘false friends of French syntax’):

RIEN DE MOINS QUE = pas autre chose que, tout à fait. Ex. “Votre discours n’est rien de moins que de la démagogie”
Et

RIEN MOINS QUE = pas du tout, nullement. Ex. (sic Klaus) “La vierge n’est rien moins qu’une prostituée” (FNBL2)

As in the example before, in this utterance the *locuteur* remains implicit: there’s no deictic element which would point to an explicit subject. In order to understand the transmitted knowledge, it is necessary to consider the utterance as a response to a preceding hypothesis about the synonymy of the two phraseologisms presented here.⁶ Thus the transmitted knowledge can be outlined as ‘there is a meaning difference between *rien de moins que* and *rien moins que*’. The *locuteur* gives a comparison of the two different French phraseologisms. The use of capitals, equal signs, the description of meaning together with an example of use of the ‘entry’ give this utterance a strong intertextual hint: it is the voice of a dictionary entry. As in the first example, the *locuteur* introduces an epistemic authority as *énonciateur* of their utterance and creates an authoritarian self based on an external source of knowledge. However this self-presentation does not bear on authority-based argumentation only; rather, there is a reference to a cognitive process of comparison as a strategy of conclusion-finding which may be identified as a *locuteur’s* claim for expertise. Firstly this is obvious by the elementary comparative act of confrontation

⁵ Due to the limited extent of this article, it is not possible to analyse systematically the position and textual/interactional functions of this kind of factual utterances. This has to be done in further work.

⁶ Due to limitations of space, it is not possible to present the whole verbal exchange.

of the two slightly different forms together with the meaning explanations. By means of the connector *et*, this rather implicit comparison becomes more explicit and a *locuteur*-subject emerges as conceptualiser of the contrast. Thus here we have a self-presentation that not only relies on a (normative) external source of knowledge but on an intellectual operation of the *locuteur*. We interpret this hint to a subjective cognitive process as an expertise claiming *locuteur*.

The following posting is initial to a thread about “Trace des anciennes déclinaisons” (‘tracks of old declinations’), the posted knowledge is centered on the changes from Latin to Old French focusing on Latin declinations which are not conserved in Old French.

L’ancien français *n’a* conservé *que* deux cas *des* déclinaisons latines, le nominatif (appelé cas sujet) et l’accusatif (cas régime). Trois mots font exception, puisqu’ils représentent le génitif singulier (vendredi, de Veneris dies), le génitif pluriel (la Chandeleur, de dies candelorum) et l’ablatif pluriel (Aix, de Aquis). *Les* déclinaisons, abandonnées vers le quatorzième siècle, ont laissé des traces dans le français moderne: [...]. (FNBL5)

In this text fragment, rather specialised and detailed knowledge is presented. In contrast to the above cited posting, here we are able to recognise the conceptualising subject and the distinction that is made between subject and content of the assertion: The sender uses the French focus particle *ne...que* to restrict the proposition of his utterance: ‘Old French has conserved two cases of Latin declination but these are only part of the whole of Latin declinations’. This restriction is based on knowledge about the whole system of Latin declination, thus with the use of the focus particle *ne...que* the speaker subject refers to a wider knowledge context and at the same time highlights and intensifies the content of their message. Though the definite article *des déclinaisons* is a hint to known information and general knowledge, the reference to a wider knowl-

edge context is also a reference to the *locuteur's* own expertise on the topic. The *locuteur* is constructing a self as a person who is competent in the matter they are talking about, who possesses a 'tacit' competence much more extensive than what is explicitly expressed. This self-presentation as an expert can be interpreted as the underlying social function of their assertive speech act.

4.2.2. Expression of evidentiality and self-presentation

As mentioned before, evidentiality is the verbal indication of the source of transmitted knowledge. The following analysis focuses on the expression of evidentiality as one of the manifestations of subject emergence and *ethos* construction in assertive speech acts. For the purpose of our research topic, the expression of evidentiality and self-presentation will be relevant.

Evidentiality can be expressed by various verbal strategies that distinguish different types of evidentiality. It can be expressed, for example, by revealing the *locuteur's* cognitive operations such as inference, or, for example, by indicating external sources as is the case in reported speech. The following example which is the first posting of a thread named "Mots français dans les autres langues" ('French words in other languages') shows both of them. The *locuteur* of the utterance is explicit, as can be seen by the use of the first person pronouns *je*, and *me*:

Je viens de terminer un roman américain: Wake up, Sir! de Jonathan Ames, dans lequel j'ai trouvé une petite vingtaine de mots français, ou d'origine française *il me semble*: route, vigilance, roman à clef, chez, maladies, rôle, motif, carton, commode, sangfroid, porte cochère, plateau, sang, camaraderie, prénom, sans, contretemps, boudoir, coup de foudre, nom de guerre, to play solitaire, in lieu of, crayon boxes, bureaux ! [...] [italics M.S.-K.] (FNBL4)

The knowledge transmitted in this posting can be outlined as 'French decisively influences English language'. The whole utter-

ance ends with an exclamation mark which points to the *locuteur's* supposition that their information might be new, unexpected, and surprising to his French-speaking interlocutors. The utterance evokes and contests the collective French knowledge and the discourse of language purism, complains about English influence on and loss of French which in this case assumes the part of the *énonciateur* of the utterance: it is the collective 'voice' behind the assertion. As basis for his knowledge the *locuteur* draws on the novel *Wake up Sir!* by Jonathan Ames which in the utterance represents a further *locuteur* (λ). This *locuteur* λ provides the examples which lead to the above expressed conclusion introduced by the evidential marking of an inference, "il me semble", 'it seems to me'. Within the whole utterance, the evidential expressions operate as text structuring markers and make the *locuteur's* (L) process of coming to a conclusion comprehensive: The lecture of an English novel is presented as a trigger of perception and conclusion: a complex process of cognition which corresponds to the construction of a rational *ethos*. The *locuteur* presents their self as an intellectually competent self that combines the qualities of being a lecturer of English novels, being a speaker of English, knowing French language discourses, being able to come to conclusions and, as such, producing and sharing knowledge.

In evidential research, a – although controversially discussed – relation between the expression of evidentiality and modality is established. Once affirming the relation between both, the evidential marker "il me semble", 'it seems to me', can be interpreted as an expression of the *locuteur's* stance to the transmitted knowledge, attenuating the assertion and the claim of its validity. With this attenuated claim of validity, the *locuteur* makes their assertion open to scrutinisation and, of course, to forum discussion. The position of the posting at the beginning of the thread confirms the

observation. It is probable that the *locuteur* seeks agreement in order to reconfirm his *ethos* and ‘save his face’.

The following example is part of the thread “*En charge de, chargé de*” (‘in charge of’). It consists of the initial posting and two answers which refer to two different parts of the posting. I will mention and analyse them separately; here, the focus is on the initial assertion and the use of further evidentiality markers:

On remarque que l’expression “en charge de” est employée de plus en plus fréquemment au détriment de “chargé de” ou “responsable de”. Encore une influence de l’anglais. *On entend* même des ministres employer “en charge de” (Christine Lagarde notamment). [italics M.S.-K.] (FNBL1)

Here, the evidential markers “*on remarque*” (‘one remarks’) and “*on entend*” (‘one hears’) indicate a *locuteur* who verbally makes themselves appear as part of the utterance and thus introduces a distinction between the transmitted knowledge and the knowledge transmitting subject. An examination of the part of the utterance that represents the transmitted knowledge shows a complex multilayered construction of different *locuteurs* and *énonciateurs* the knowledge construction can be ascribed to:

- Highlighted by quotation marks are citations of French phraseologisms. These can be interpreted as discourse traditions anchored in the collective memory of speakers of the French language as knowledge about language use. The use of quotation marks makes them appear as citations of a *locuteur* λ , the *locuteur* L does not identify himself with.
- The *locuteur* creates a contrast between a *locuteur* λ of 1.) the preferred but disadvantaged discourse traditions “chargé de” and “responsable de” and 2.) a further *locuteur* λ of the discourse traditions which are the cause of the disadvantage “en charge de”.

- Furthermore, the locuteur introduces a *locuteur* λ which can be identified as an empirical speaker subject, Christine Lagarde.
- The *locuteur* introduces an *énonciateur* who can be determined as a medium which transmits the implicit knowledge that authentic French expressions are substituted by English loan translations.

Notably, this is a very complex knowledge construction, the sources of which are distributed to different *locuteurs* and *énonciateurs*. As concerns the *locuteur*, there is no use of deictic personal pronouns. Instead we find the use of the impersonal pronoun “on”, as part of the evidential constructions “on remarque” and “on entend”. They refer to a type of evidentiality usually determined as expressing intersubjective accessible “hearsay knowledge”: everybody notes, everybody hears. As such, it appears like a rule or an unscrutinisable and ‘true’ knowledge; the *locuteur* merely appears as the observing instance. The evidentiality expressions are used in function of the self-presentation of the *locuteur* as the agent of the production of knowledge, which is a collectively accepted knowledge and a normative force that evaluates the reality behind the knowledge as a reality that has to be changed. Their self-presentation as a normative authority becomes even clearer through the use of deontic expressions such as “il faut dire” (‘one must say’) and “il serait souhaitable” (‘it would be preferable’) in the next part of their utterance:

[...] *Il faut dire* “le ministère chargé de l’agriculture”.

J’ai envoyé la remarque par courriel à l’Académie française, mais je n’ai pas eu de réponse. *Il serait souhaitable* qu’ils l’indiquent dans leur site, dans la rubrique “questions de langue”. [italics M.S.-K.] (FNBL1)

As our focus is on the assertive speech acts and the expression of evidentiality as a means of self-presentation, we will not analyse these deontic speech acts further. This will be left for further

analysis. Instead, in the next section, we will examine an example of interactive self-presentation.

4.2.3. *Self-presentation, interactive subjectivation, and epistemic struggle*

In this section we change the focus of analysis from utterances without to utterances with direct addressing. As we observe, one of the characteristics of knowledge-oriented forum communication is the alternation between postings of assertive speech acts without direct addressing in order to ‘solely’ contribute knowledge which, as we have shown, mostly can be interpreted as the construction of an *ethos* defined by authority and normativity, and postings of assertive speech acts with direct addressing, which will be analysed in the following section. The following posting, which is a reaction to the one analysed in the section before, initiates with a question that addresses the *locuteur* of the former utterance directly and roughly can be defined as a further inquiry question on the treated issue.⁷

Avez-vous eu la curiosité de regarder dans son dictionnaire en ligne, en utilisant l’expression “en charge de” ?

Vous arriverez probablement à proscrire et vous verrez ce que l’Académie en dit au travers d’un exemple.

Une recherche rapide avec Google livres semble montrer que l’usage de l’expression n’est ni récent ni rare. (FNBL1)

The posting is a reactive utterance to the preceding one; cohesion between both is reached for example by the use of the French possessive pronoun *son* which refers to the before mentioned *Académie*

⁷ A further analysis of the questions made in the forum is necessary in order to classify their textual positions, their textual and their interactive functions, etc. There are, contrary to the type of question treated in this section, questions that initiate a thread, which are made in order to open up a discussion, and sometimes these are questions for advice or instruction. A further inquiry in this aspect has to be postponed to further research on the topic.

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Française. For our research topic a more interesting means of cohesion is the direct addressing of the *locuteur* of the preceding posting (cf. *avez-vous* ['did you'], and *vous arriverez* ['you will reach at']) which has the effect of making the hitherto implicit subject of the preceding utterance emerge as an explicit subject and give it the identity of a *locuteur*.

The entire posting has to be interpreted in relation to the preceding one and can be summed up as a dispute of the validity of the transmitted knowledge. As such, it is an example that stands for a kind of reaction posting that can be observed with high frequency. As a general observation it can be found that folk-linguistic forum discussions frequently seem to end up in conflictive sequences which we denominate, in analogy to the concept of 'semantic struggles' (Felder 2006), as 'epistemic struggles' where different *locuteurs* struggle for the hegemony of possessing the 'right knowledge'. As shown before, they draw on different sources in order to reach that goal. In this posting, the *locuteur* not only draws on different sources but highlights their knowledge of sources. This observation has to be analysed more in detail. As mentioned before, what is disputed in this posting is the knowledge of sources of knowledge, expressed by the interactive sequence which can be singled out as utterance 1:

J'ai envoyé la remarque par courriel à l'Académie française, mais je n'ai pas eu de réponse [...]

contested by the ironic question, utterance 2:

Avez-vous eu la curiosité de regarder dans son dictionnaire en ligne „dictionnaire en ligne” [...]

This ironic question is especially interesting for our research topic. As Dendale (2006) points out, irony is one of the markers of polyphony. In our case, it is directly addressed irony: as a reaction to the information about an e-mail to the *Académie Française*, the *locuteur* of this utterance poses the question whether the addressee

had had the curiosity to consult the online dictionary of the *Académie Française* (in lieu of writing emails that won't be answered) against their own better knowledge that the addressee didn't do so. The irony of his question expresses distance between themselves and the addressee at the same time as it highlights their own knowledge about this particular source of knowledge. This ignorance of the source of knowledge makes the addressee appear incompetent – because of his ineffective act of e-mailing and his complaining about the missing answer.

As has been mentioned at the beginning of this section, the whole posting is a dispute of the validity of the knowledge presented by the former *locuteur*. The present *locuteur* presents themselves as a person who shows his competence not by giving their own arguments on the topic but by knowing where to get the respective knowledge. By this they gain double: not only that they show their own knowledge but also the addressee's ignorance of sources and of knowledge; as a further source of knowledge they introduce *Google livres* where the *locuteur* found out that the point their discursive precedent made is wrong.

4.2.4. *Epistemic struggles and the emergence of the empirical subject*

As has been shown, self-presentation and *ethos* construction are very much connected to the knowledge of and the reference to different sources: the subject presents their self as gaining expertise by referring to and reflecting on various sources of knowledge, be those different *locuteurs* or different *énonciateurs*. Respecting the very nature of internet forum interaction, at the beginning of this work we decided to exclude the (existence of) the empirical speaker subject from our analysis. Up to this point, our analysis directed us towards different moments of subject emergence and self-presentation of the *locuteur*. Our next example shows an instance of emergence of an empirical subject. The posting is part of the

thread that focuses on the topic of “Mots français dans les autres langues” and is directed to an addressee nicknamed “groseille”:

Je crains, groseille, que vous ne soyez pas de taille à rivaliser avec la culture linguistique de Marco, qui est professeur de langues et notamment de la nôtre, et dont l’érudition en ce domaine dépasse de loin ce que nous en savons, qui que nous soyons. Il me semble que vous recevez de sources douteuses des étymologies à la va-vite dont l’authenticité n’est pas confirmée, et qui relèvent de la fantaisie. Ne prenez pas pour argent comptant les élucubrations des étymologistes à la petite semaine.

Le Dictionnaire historique de la langue française précise que manager a été emprunté par le français en 1785 à l’anglais to manage = diriger un cheval, attesté dans cette langue dès le XVI^e s. C’est surtout l’américain qui a contribué à l’introduction de manager en français, avec d’abord le sens de maître de cérémonie. Le mot anglais aurait peut-être été emprunté à l’italien maneggiare, dont le déverbal maneggio a donné manège.

Je résume un article qui est beaucoup plus long. (FNBL4)

As is obvious, this whole posting corroborates the hypothesis that internet forum discussion is mainly about possessing the knowledge of sources on behalf of presenting self and constructing *ethos*. In the utterances that compose the posting, there is a deictic subject, a *je*; beyond this explicit *locuteur* various discursive voices are emerging. However interesting and complex these voices are, we will only focus on the emergence of an empirical subject which we situate right at the beginning of the posting:

Je crains, groseille, que vous ne soyez pas de taille à rivaliser avec la culture linguistique de Marco, qui est professeur de langues et notamment de la nôtre, et dont l’érudition en ce domaine dépasse de loin ce que nous en savons, qui que nous soyons [...].

The utterance addresses directly the *locuteur* of the preceding utterance nicknamed *groseille* and refers to their posting. The *locuteur* is contesting directly the competence of their addressee, which

again is a case of self-presentation by downgrading the knowledge and the knowledge of the sources of knowledge of the interlocutor. One of the sources which this excerpt of the posting points to is a virtual identity nicknamed *Marco* who here emerges as an empirical subject and source of knowledge. The *locuteur* constructs the *ethos* of this third person by emphasising their expertise in ‘real life’: they present the third person as a *professeur de langues et notamment de la nôtre* (‘professor of languages and notably of ours’) and thereby portray their own knowledge about the real identity of this forum discussion participant. Due to the principle of anonymity, this is a rather rare strategy of subject emergence in the forum. It establishes an interface between virtual and real life.

4.2.5. *Explicit subjects and self-presentation by expression of politeness*

Along with excluding the empirical subject, at the beginning of this chapter there was a distinction made between face work/self-presentation and the verbal expression of politeness. We supposed self-presentation without explicit politeness behaviour to be one of the main communicative activities in the knowledge transmission-oriented forum; we even observed epistemic struggles as one of the knowledge exchange activities which leads to the hypothesis that conflict-avoidant behaviour does not count as one of the preferred strategies of virtual social behaviour. In this last analysed example of our chapter we will restrict or even contradict this hypothesis by analysing the utterances of three successive postings which show what we think has to be interpreted as a politeness behaviour. The utterances are part of a thread about English influence on French, a topic that leads to quite animated discussions.

Par contre, évidemment, quand on utilise un terme d’une langue étrangère, souvent c’est par snobisme, par effet de mode, etc. Là, je pense que tout le monde est d’accord...

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Je suis en total accord avec les points avancés ici par Marco, mais pas complètement avec votre idée, oliglesias, lorsque vous citez le snobisme comme raison principale d'utilisation de mots étrangers. Ceci me semble des plus réducteurs, si je peux m'exprimer honnêtement...

Ce n'est pas moi qui ait avancé cette idée en premier... je la reprenais. Personnellement, j'utilisais snobisme à la place d'imitation d'une langue "à la mode"... sachant qu'une langue peut être à la mode pour plusieurs raisons: rayonnement culturel, économique, politique, militaire, etc. (FNBL4)

The proposition of the first posting is an interpretation and evaluation of the verbal behaviour of French speakers who use English loans which is considered as a sign of snob behaviour.⁸ The use of the adverb *évidemment* ('obviously') as well as the explicit utterance *tout le monde est d'accord* ('everybody agrees') indicate a high degree of evidence and, thus, reliability. At the same time, this can be interpreted as a form of evoking collective knowledge. Translated in terms of politeness theory, this can be interpreted as claiming in-group identity, as affiliation to the own sociocultural group which in this case is the group of the speakers of French.

In the answer to this posting, there is an expression of dissent by which the information is evaluated as a simplified perception of reality. With their expression of dissent, the *locuteur* implicitly refers to their own expertise of the discussed topic. However, this objection to the preceding utterance is attenuated by the use of an evidentiality marker *il me semble*. The function of this attenuation can be interpreted as a politeness strategy to downgrade the face-threatening act and conflictive potential of expressing dissent. Contrary to the face work strategies shown up to this moment, this is not an example of self-oriented face work but rather a redressive

⁸ It is remarkable that the speaker while condemning the use of English loans uses one himself!

action in order to avoid damage to the face of ALTER. As reaction to this contradiction, the *locuteur* of the following posting dissociates themselves from their own statement. The *locuteur* refuses their commitment to the information by an explicit hint to their use of another – not specified – source of information, *ce n'est pas moi qui ait avancé cette idée en premier... je la reprenais* ('it's not me who forwarded this idea as the first... I adopted it'). Here, we can observe a very explicit verbal strategy of self-oriented face work; it seems that the speaker/subject has to restore their own expertise referring to their own knowledge, *sachant que [...]* ('knowing that...').

5. Conclusion

Due to the general topic of Social Media communication and our special subject of linguistic knowledge exchange in the internet forum *Français notre belle langue*, in this article we focused on verbal expressions of EGO-oriented face work. According to the distinctive characteristics of internet forum communication as, for example, the lack of face-to-face encounter, we decided to introduce the concepts of self-presentation and ethos construction in lieu of using the terminology that coins the concept of face and face work as originally introduced by Goffman. We took a further step in establishing a relationship between subject in discourse, polyphony, expression of evidentiality, and self-presentation which served as background for our analysis of knowledge transmission in the internet forum and provided us with a useful distinction between empirical speakers, *locuteur* and *énonciateur*.

Our exemplary analysis of utterances as parts of postings shows that self-presentation has to be conceived of within a continuum with gradual emergence of an explicit subject. As the main concern

of self-presentation, we identified the construction of competence and expertise as features of self which include linguistic knowledge as well as knowledge of sources of knowledge and the command of establishing relations between these sources and own cognitive processes. The focus on self-presentation even leads to epistemic struggles where the *locuteurs* of different postings struggle for epistemic hegemony. We also found an exception to the rule of anonymity of forum participants and concluded our analysis with one example of self-presentation with politeness expression.

As mentioned in the introductory section, our analysis is rather selective. Thus our results have to be supported by analysing more examples which at the same time might broaden the outcomes.

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###NICHT AUFFINDBAR###

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Impoliteness in the Negotiation of Expert Status: Folk Linguistic Debates in a French Online Forum

1. Introduction

Recent works underline the importance of analysing (im)politeness in its context (Bousfield 2008; Culpeper 2008; Locher/Watts 2005, 2008) and specifically its role in the formation of identities in social interaction (Graham 2007). Therefore, the perspective is shifting from studying isolated linguistic structures to the observation of interactions in *Communities of Practice* (CoP) (Lavé/Wenger 1991). This chapter contributes to this approach by examining impoliteness in the negotiation of expert status.

In section 2, I explain my understanding of impoliteness and its use in interaction. To this end, I adopt the notion of *relational work* (Locher/Watts 2005, 2008), aimed at constructing and negotiating relationships and identities within social contexts. The empirical data of this study draws on a sample of folk linguistic debates in a French online forum that is presented in section 3. I then discuss the notions of expert and layperson in the field of folk linguistics, allude to the difficulties of expert-layperson communication and examine the discursive construction of expert status in group practices for which status signals are essential (Rifkin/Martin 1997) (section 4).

In section 5, taking a qualitative approach, the aim is to show an example of perceived impoliteness that is a result of different expectations and interpretations of norms in CoP, influenced by constraints of the medium. These norms concern the use of technical language, as this is a typical way of seeking expert status. While diverse interpretations make it difficult for the interlocutors to adapt to “appropriate” communication, norms can be explicitly or implicitly (re-)negotiated within the CoP. Conclusions are presented in section 6.

2. Impoliteness and relational work

In contrast to Brown/Levinson’s (1987) traditional approach, more recent theories maintain it is impossible to define (im)politeness at sentence level without reference to the context. For identifying (im)politeness, it is in fact necessary to analyse *deviations* from the norms and expectations inherent in a specific CoP. The choice of each individual to behave in a certain manner allows him to position himself relative to the other group members. In this regard, the interlocutors’ own interpretation of utterances in a specific social context as (im)polite gains in importance. This is usually described in terms of politeness as a *first order concept* (politeness₁), in contrast to theoretical and technical concepts described as *second order concepts* (politeness₂).

This point of view is adopted by the notion of *relational work*, introduced by Locher/Watts, for “the ‘work’ individuals invest in negotiating relationships with others” (Locher/Watts 2005: 10). In contrast to the notion of *face work*, it is considered to have a broader meaning.

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Following Goffman we argue that any interpersonal interaction involves the participants in the negotiation of face. The term “facework”, therefore, should also span the entire breadth of interpersonal meaning. This, however, is rarely the case in the literature. Especially in accordance with Brown and Levinson’s Politeness Theory, “facework” has been largely reserved to describe only appropriate and polite behavior with a focus on face-threat mitigation, at the exclusion of rude, impolite and inappropriate behavior. To avoid confusion and in favor of clarity we adopt “relational work” as our preferred terminology [...]. (Locher/Watts 2005: 11)

Thus, relational work comprises not only interactions considered as polite, but the whole range of verbal behaviour. In models based on the *first order concept*, behaviour therefore, rather than a binary structure, is seen as a *continuum*, oscillating between the *polite, appropriate, inappropriate* and *impolite* poles (e.g. Watts 2003).

While research in the past decades has mainly focused on politeness, recently further insight has been gained into impoliteness. Following Locher/Bousfield (2008: 3) it can be defined as “face-aggravating” behaviour. However, identifying (im)politeness by referring to an interlocutor’s interpretation raises a number of questions.

With regard to the speaker’s intention, Culpeper (2008), amongst others, distinguishes between (1) *intentional* and (2) *unintentional* behaviour that is perceived as inappropriate by the audience. The former is described as “impoliteness”, the latter as “rudeness”. But also the recipient’s perception of an utterance, the perlocutionary force, has to be considered in a theoretical framework following the first order approach. To identify impoliteness, Locher/Watts (2008: 80) judge “interactants’ *perceptions* of communicators’ intentions” as even more important than those of the speakers. In fact, they illustrate that a speaker and a listener of the *same* utterance in the *same* context could interpret it differently in terms of the

(im)politeness level. Online forums offer a rich source for these considerations, because the perlocutionary effects often become visible in the responses of other users (cf. Maaß, this volume, and the relational notion of face discussed and illustrated by Ehrhardt, this volume).

As has been shown, impoliteness is also used as a strategic instrument to exercise power (Culpeper 2008); showing disrespect for the interlocutor can be part of a (re-)negotiation of status and position. Many studies point out that impolite behaviour is particularly widespread when users are allowed to publish their opinion *anonymously in computer-mediated contexts (CMC)* (Herring 2007: 16; Maaß 2012; Upadhyay 2010). In public face-to-face situations like TV debates, panellists tend to avoid behaviour that could harm their reputation (Kotthoff 1997: 142); they are aware of the impact that their behaviour could have on socially constructed power relationships. In *anonymous CMC*, on the other hand, it seems that their reputation is not threatened by inappropriate behaviour, and they might perceive *online* power relations between interactants as more equal. Besides, in CMC, as it is practised in online forums with open access, potentially *all* internet users can read the posts (Herring 2007), and thus the wide audience could increase the pressure to construct an image as a “powerful”, competent interactant defending him/herself against face-threatening acts.

3. Languefrancaise.net as community of practice

The forum Languefrancaise.net is dedicated to the discussion of French-language issues, from grammatical to stylistic to etymological questions, with, however, a focus on a normative perspective. Anonymous users can post their questions and answers and discuss them with other users; communication is asyn-

chronous and generally text-based. The messages can be read in chronological order in an archive that is divided into seven thematic categories as, for example, *Réflexions linguistiques* (linguistic reflections about rules of orthography, grammar, linguistics) with more than 3,000 topics and 30,000 postings and *Pratiques linguistiques* (linguistic practice: words and their sense, regional languages, special languages, etc.) with more than 2,000 topics and 20,000 postings (March 2013).¹ Furthermore, it is possible to search the threads for key words to find answers to questions that have already been discussed. In a table the number of views is indicated for each thread, with some going up to more than 10,000; these numbers are a reflection of the wide audience interested in the forum.

Most of the participants remain anonymous by choosing a fictional user name.² According to their place of origin, where indicated, most participants are from France, the others mostly from other francophone countries. Among the active users there are also some non-native French speakers. Users identify themselves, for example, as French teachers or translators with an academic background related to linguistic studies, or as pupils or other “amateurs” in linguistics. For each member, the total number of messages posted in the forum is visible. A number of the participants have already posted several hundred or thousands of comments, and hence meet online on a regular basis. Among these, there are 18 members who have published more than 1,000 postings so far, five of them more than 2,000 (March 2013). However, unlike in other forums, there is no verbally expressed hierarchy for “pre-

¹ Messages concerning other topics or the forum itself can be posted in four additional categories.

² In the excerpts that I quote in this paper, I have replaced the pseudonyms by “membre_A”, “membre_B” and “membre_C”.

mium” users, based on factors such as the number of posted messages or other activities.

Like other forums, Languefrancaise.net has published a *netiquette* guide to define rules of accepted conduct. Moderators can reprimand participants for (politeness) rule violations or even block inappropriate messages.

4. Experts – laypersons – negotiation of expert status

4.1. The term *folk linguistics* and the underlying expert-layperson continuum

The discussions on Languefrancaise.net can be characterised as “folk linguistic”, with “folk” referring to “those who are not trained professionals in the area under investigation” (Niedzielski/Preston (2000: viii). In the German research tradition, to differentiate from the direct translation of the English term, *Volkslinguistik*, Antos (1996: 3) coined the term *Laienlinguistik* to specifically refer to, among other things, reflections and comments on language *intended for*, and in many cases also *written by*, non-linguists, for instance in language style guides or handbooks about common errors in the use of language. Even if usually normative or prescriptive in orientation, it can also include descriptive or even entertaining treatment of linguistic questions or problems.³ Nowadays, specialised online forums like Languefrancaise.net (cf. Kunkel in press), as well as other forms of CMC (cf. Hardy/Her-

³ For a brief overview about English, German and French terminology and research traditions in the field of folk linguistics cf. Achard-Bayle/Paveau 2008: 6-8; Stegu 2008.

ling/Patzelt in press), have brought folk linguistic discussions to the internet and thus opened them to a wide audience.

As widely discussed in research about folk linguistics, the distinction between experts and laypersons is not as clear as it might seem at first glance (cf. also Schrader-Kniffki, this volume). A division into *simple* and *double* folk linguistics, in other words texts written *by* laypersons *for* laypersons on the one hand and those written *by* experts *for* laypersons on the other hand, as proposed by Law (2007: 11), appears to be untenable. More recent works discuss the difficulties of drawing on criteria such as a university degree in linguistics, professional experience in a related field or linguistic knowledge (Baderschneider/Kessel 2010) and point out an underlying continuum (Stegu 2008).

4.2. Expert-layperson communication

As research has generally shown, conflicts might arise in expert-layperson communication. A major difficulty consists of the lack of information about what exactly is the layperson's prior knowledge of the problem and of the expert's capacity to formulate adequately their explanation, taking the audience into account (*audience design*). Clark (1992), in his *common ground theory*, states that individuals involved in a conversation must share knowledge, *common ground*, in order to communicate efficiently and to reach mutual comprehension. Bromme/Jucks/Runde (2005: 90), drawing on the example of expert-layperson communication in the medical field, argue, "that the problematic impact of such knowledge differences might be augmented by a computer as the medium of communication". In their experiment, a health expert has to respond to a (fictional) e-mail inquiry on health topics, sent by (1) a layperson, (2) a "co-expert" from a neighbouring discipline and therefore adapt the *audience design* of the message.

4.3. Negotiation of expert status

Rifkin/Martin (1997) underline that a distinction has to be made between the status of expert/professional *in society* (as discussed in 4.1) and *in a conversation*.

Expert status represents a measure of authority over a conversation. Expert status refers to a concept very different from that of the status of experts, such as engineers, in society. One might say, using engineering parlance, that the system boundaries for the two concepts are different. The status of experts in society has society as the relevant system. Expert status [...] has the conversation as the relevant system. (Rifkin/Martin 1997: 31)

Depending strictly on the conversation itself, expert status as a socially constructed role is therefore provisional and can always change. Often, the interlocutors do not even have the capacity and knowledge to verify the statements of others (Rifkin/Martin 1997: 31/32). So, “real expertise” is not immediately decisive or sufficient to gain *expert status*:

[...] Expert Status appears to be a result of Participation in the community of practice. Doubtless, there is an influence of Expertise on Expert Status, however this is mediated by Participation. (Nistor/Fischer 2012: 117)

In the negotiation of expert status, other strategies are important. Among the *status signals* that serve to negotiate expert status, there are *extra-linguistic* status information factors such as knowledge, institutional hierarchy, physical power or personal relations, referring to the social context of a person. In the context of anonymous CMC, however, the social context can be eliminated so that *linguistic* means become crucial.⁴

⁴ On a detailed analysis of different self-presentation strategies in forum discussions cf. also Schrader-Kniffki in this volume.

On the one hand, among linguistic resources there are *specific* status signals that seem to be the most important ones in negotiating status in a group (Ridgeway 2001: 359f.). A clear cue in a conversation is the competent use of technical language (Rifkin/Martin 1997: 34). Another strategy, used by participants to substitute the aforesaid *extra-linguistic* status information (missing in anonymous CMC), is to mention the expertise gained and/or proven by education, professional experience or social status. If this expertise – be it real or fictional – is relevant to the subject discussed in the thread, it can help to position the users as experts. This is, for example, the case when users claim to have an academic background in linguistics, as described above.

On the other hand, expert status is negotiated by *non-specific, diffuse* status signals. Kotthoff (1997), in her analysis of “[t]he interactional achievement of expert status” in TV discussions, describes how “highly debatable claims are explicitly presented in the most straightforward manner”, “without any marker of subjectivity” (165). She distinguishes two *conversational styles*: the *expository style*, in which “facts, knowledge and/or opinions” are exposed, while the knowledge of others can be devalued, is “potentially status-enhancing, valued talk” (157). In *exploratory style*, speakers “first outline the questions to be asked instead of merely providing answers” (157) and present their opinion in a more contained way; it is less likely that they dominate the conversation (140).

To analyse the role of (perceived) impoliteness in the negotiation of expert status, I have chosen an example in which a user, MEMBRE_A, is reprehended for the use of technical (and thus potentially incomprehensible) language as one of the *specific* status signals described above.

5. (Perceived) impoliteness and negotiation of expert status: example

The example to be discussed is found in a thread opened by a user who wants to know if the expression “tout au long”, apparently meaning “plus en détail” (*more detailed*) or “davantage” (*more*) in an “old text” he read, is still in use. The main interlocutors in the following extracts are MEMBRE_A, MEMBRE_B and MEMBRE_C. With about 600 posts since 2008 (MEMBRE_A), 700 posts since 2009 (MEMBRE_C) and 2,000 posts since 2011 (MEMBRE_B), they are all active users and have met in other threads before. MEMBRE_A, in his signature, presents himself as “typographe, relecteur-correcteur, dictionnairiste” (*typographer, proofreader, lexicographer*) and he has a special status in his profile of “onomathécaire”.

I will briefly summarise the context in which the following extract is embedded. Among the different replies, the one posted by MEMBRE_A explains that in a proofreader’s language, to write an abbreviation or a number “tout au long”, means to write them out in full. MEMBRE_C replies directly to this post, explaining that throughout his career as a “correcteur” (*proofreader*), he had always heard this expression used without “tout”. MEMBRE_A in his response describes some details about editing procedures, for example how to indicate that a number has to be written out. MEMBRE_B refers to the rather technical printer’s terminology used by MEMBRE_A (“en voilà du lexique!” *this is lexicon!*) and asks if the terms “corrigeur” and “corrigeage”, employed by MEMBRE_A, have nowadays disappeared or been developed further. Citing from the dictionary *Édition et techniques éditoriales* by Jacques Berthelot (Hachette Technique 1992), MEMBRE_A in his answer explains thoroughly six technical terms from his previous response, including “corrigeur”: typographic worker who materi-

ally implements the corrections asked for by the “correcteur” (*proofreader*) or the author. MEMBRE_B thanks MEMBRE_A for his detailed explanations. He regrets that MEMBRE_A does not write more often on the forum and concludes his post with “respectueuses salutations” (*respectful greetings*). At this point, MEMBRE_C comments on the incident as follows:

(1) MEMBRE_C, 11-04-2012

Vous avez eu raison, cher membre_B, de faire cette intervention. Parce que dire bonjour et transmettre sa cordialité est bien, mais utiliser un jargon professionnel quand on s'adresse à des personnes qui ne sont pas toutes « de la partie » est pour moi la marque d'une grande impolitesse. Je n'aimerais pas qu'un ingénieur agronome ou un scaphandrier s'adressent à moi en utilisant des termes techniques de leur métier auxquels je n'entendrais rien. J'ai publié deux récits de mer : j'ai veillé à utiliser le moins de termes du vocabulaire marin possible, et, quand je le faisais, à les expliciter dans une langue courante. (Langue Française 2012)

You were right, dear membre_B, to make this intervention. Because to greet and to transmit one's cordiality is fine, but to use professional jargon when you address people that are not “from your group” is for me a sign of great impoliteness. I would not appreciate an agricultural engineer or a scuba diver addressing me with technical terms from their profession with which I would not understand anything. I have published two stories of the sea: I made sure to use the minimum number of marine terms and, when I did, to explain them in common language.

MEMBRE_B, 11-04-2012

Je n'ai pas perçu le message de membre_A comme impoli, d'autant plus qu'il n'a pas hésité à développer et expliquer. Si c'était devenu un dialogue fermé entre deux spécialistes, ç'aurait été désagréable. Cela n'a pas été le cas. [...] (Langue Française 2012)

I didn't perceive membre_A's message as impolite, all the more since he has not hesitated to develop and explain it. If this had been a dialogue between two specialists, it would have been unpleasant. This has not been the case. [...]

Extract 1 shows how users discuss what they consider polite and impolite behaviour in the forum. At first, MEMBRE_C recognises the *formal* politeness of MEMBRE_A's posts: they are opened by a greeting and concluded by "cordialement" (*cordially*). However, he perceives "great impoliteness" in MEMBRE_A's use of printer's professional jargon despite knowing that other users would not understand him. MEMBRE_B contradicts him, pointing out MEMBRE_A's readiness to explain the technical terms.

In this extract we can observe a *negotiation of politeness rules* that are particularly *relevant* to the formation of expert and layperson roles in anonymous online forums: MEMBRE_C claims that the use of technical terms that potentially not everyone on the forum understands, should be avoided and hence accuses MEMBRE_A of (intentional) impoliteness. In MEMBRE_B's view, explanation "on request" is sufficient.

By referring to his own stories of the sea, in which he had avoided using technical terms without further explanation, MEMBRE_C *constitutes* himself as an *author* and an expert on marine subjects. In a similar way he mentioned his career as a *proofreader* earlier in this thread, and later on, in a post not cited here, even as a *translator*. Furthermore, he describes a pedagogical approach when he says that, when he uses difficult words, he explains them to the readers.⁵ While, so far, the discourse was about printing and marine terms – terms of special domains that are not the focus of the forum –, further on in the thread MEMBRE_A draws MEMBRE_C's attention to his observation that "savants linguistes" (*experts in linguistics*) in this forum also demonstrate the

⁵ In another post, membre_C explains: "employer un mot peu connu en l'explicitant, c'est de la pédagogie; l'employer tel quel, comme si tout le monde était censé le connaître, c'est ... autre chose" (*to use a little known word explaining it, that's pedagogy; using it as it is, as if everybody should know its meaning, that's ... something else*).

habit of using a vocabulary that is incomprehensible to foreign language learners.

(2) MEMBRE_C, 12-04-2012

Sans être un «apprenant étranger», je ne comprends rien à la plupart de ces interventions de linguistes. Mais comme il s'agit de sujets très techniques qui ne me passionnent guère (du moins l'approche linguistique qu'on en fait ne me passionne guère, justement parce que je n'y entends rien), je me contente de passer mon chemin. S'agissant de l'expression *tout au long* qui est à l'origine de ce fil, il n'était pas nécessaire, pour en parler, de sortir du langage courant que tout le monde comprend. [...]

est impoli le fait de jargonner en parlant devant des gens qui ne connaissent pas le jargon employé. Cela revient à les exclure de la discussion : laissez-nous causer entre spécialistes ! [...] (Langue Française 2012)

Without being a "foreign learner", I don't understand anything in most of the linguists' comments. But as they are about very technical subjects that hardly interest me (at least the linguistic approach that they take hardly interests me, precisely because I don't understand it at all), I'm satisfied with going my way. As it was the expression tout au long that was the origin of this thread, it was not necessary, in order to discuss it, to abandon the common language that everybody understands. [...]

it is impolite to use jargon when speaking in front of people that have no knowledge of the jargon used. This is equivalent to excluding them from the discussion: let's talk among specialists! [...]

MEMBRE_C argues that, even as a *native speaker*, he is not able to understand the posts of linguists. But he sees it in a slightly different way: as the rather technical subjects discussed by linguists do not interest him, he ignores those posts. He explains that in the present case, things are different because the topic of the thread did not make it *necessary* to use technical terms.

In the negotiation process, MEMBRE_C differentiates between topics of common interest and rather technical topics that are not

of interest to him (but perhaps exclusively for an audience of linguists). Only in the latter case does the exclusion of laypersons by the use of jargon seem not to bother him and could be justified in his eyes.

Further on in the thread, the debate continues along the same lines, without reaching a shared view.

6. Discussion and conclusion

The example shows that the use of technical terms, in the literature generally described as a (competitive) strategy for seeking expert status, in our example is closely connected with (im)politeness issues.

MEMBRE_C, in extract 1 and 2, interprets MEMBRE_A's behaviour as clearly *non-cooperative*. He criticises him for not taking into consideration that other members might not understand his technical terms and that he thus (intentionally) excludes them from the conversation. Therefore MEMBRE_C feels that MEMBRE_A is exercising power over other members and perceives his post as impolite. MEMBRE_A, on the other hand, supported by MEMBRE_B, claims to be *cooperative* by explaining the terms afterwards to other members who have not understood them. So in this specific situation, speaker and listener interpret MEMBRE_A's behaviour differently.

Among the reasons why expert-layperson communication includes the risk of not meeting a layperson's needs, there is (1) the lack of information about *common ground* and (2) experts' (non-) willingness to cooperate.

As Bromme/Jucks/Runde (2005) have already argued, due to scarce status information and nearly non-existing extra-/

paralinguistic signals, in computer-mediated contexts it is more difficult for experts to gain insights into the interlocutor's prior knowledge and measure *common ground*. But in the context of their experiment, at least the expert's *role as advisor* is clearly defined. In an *anonymous* online forum discussion as in *Languefrancaise.net*, on the other hand, expert status is created merely through negotiation: users have to enhance and defend this status constantly, and thus their motivation to use appropriate linguistic strategies is likely to increase.

Therefore, I argue that in *anonymous CMC*, such as *Languefrancaise.net*, it is not only more difficult for participants to identify "appropriate" behaviour in terms of *audience design*, but also, behaviour will be perceived, more likely, as non-cooperative and, therefore, impolite.

As in Graham (2007), users in this forum *negotiate norms*. In this case, participants discuss MEMBRE_C's proposition to use only terms that are comprehensible to laypersons in the forum. During these (re)negotiations, several "guidelines" are proposed such as limiting the use of technical terms to technical questions that really require them or explaining technical terms when using them for the first time in a thread. Obviously, it is very difficult to reach a compromise in this field, as expectations depend on context and participants. In the *netiquette* guidelines of this forum no hint is given on this topic.

These insights underline the importance of a context-based analysis of utterances: utterances are not *per se* polite or impolite, but their interpretation depends on the co-construction and negotiation of norms within the community. Furthermore, the analysis confirms that the constraints of the computer medium also have an impact on norms and participants' expectations.

However, further research is needed to understand better the impact of impoliteness on relational work. With regard to the nego-

tiation of expert status, as discussed in this paper, it would certainly be interesting to know more about the perception of impoliteness connected with other linguistic strategies of those mentioned above. Furthermore, investigation of previous contacts between the three participants in our example could help to explain the solidarity between MEMBRE_B and MEMBRE_A, independently of the judgement of the current incident. In this way, it would be possible to gain more insight into the long-term construction of relationships and expert status (Locher 2004: 5); to this end, online forums with archives going back for several years offer us a rich source.

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A Matter of Politeness? On the Role of Face-Threatening Acts in Online Tutoring

1. Introduction

More and more human communication processes shift to Social Media. In this study, we focus on tutoring as a specific learning situation since it is easily transferred to online communication settings and, above all, constitutes a very effective form of instruction (Cohen/Kulik/Kulik 1982; Graesser/D'Mello/Cade 2010).

Over the past 20 years, research has identified behaviours typically exhibited by tutors and pinpointed those which are effective in facilitating learning gains on part of the tutee (Graesser/Person/Magliano 1995; Lepper/Woolverton 2002). However, there are tutorial moves which tutors, especially novice tutors, seem hesitant to use: Novice tutors use more motivational and less cognitive scaffolding than expert tutors although cognitive scaffolding seems to have a larger impact on learning outcomes (Cromley/Azevedo 2005). Person et al. (1995) argue that tutors' reluctance to use certain instructional strategies is due to their desire to not impose on their tutees. They assumed that these strategies, e.g.

negative feedback or requesting actions, are incompatible with politeness principles to which tutors try to adhere.

In our previous studies, we have focused on the tutors' actions and found that politeness considerations do indeed impact on the use of specific tutoring strategies (Brummernhenrich/Jucks 2013; Bromme/Jucks/Runde 2012). In the current study, we focus on the recipients' perspective. Duthler (2006: 515) notes that "politeness varied with communication medium" and points out specific characteristics of synchronous text-based communication, i.e. chat, as used in the current study. According to Sussman/Sproull (1999, in Duthler 2006: 518), synchronous CMC can be "more direct and less polite than synchronous telephone or face-to-face interactions". Therefore, it seems beneficial to examine the role of politeness in online tutoring settings.

2. Politeness Theory

Brown and Levinson (1987) posit that certain speech acts threaten the face of the interlocutor (face-threatening acts, FTAs), referring to the concept of face as defined by Goffman (1967). They differentiate positive face, meaning a person's desire for social acceptance and belonging, and negative face, the desire to be autonomous and unrestricted in one's actions. According to their theory people use linguistic politeness strategies when performing FTAs in order to communicate their will to respect these two face aspects. Just as there is a positive and negative face, there are also positive and negative politeness strategies to attend to them. Each set of strategies aims at mitigating the face-threat of certain kinds of speech acts that contain an imposition, such as requests or corrections.

Concerning tutorial settings, research indicates that polite behaviour can entail both benefits and detriments. Person et al. (1995) give a detailed analysis of tutorial moves and their advantages and disadvantages. They conclude that excessive politeness can hinder the effectiveness of tutoring. Similarly, we found in a previous study that tutors explained more extensively when encouraged to disregard face concerns (Bromme/Jucks/Runde 2012). Wang et al. (2008) however found a positive effect of polite tutorial feedback on learning gains. In a series of studies, Kerssen-Griep and his group showed that polite instructors improved learners' perceptions of several relevant variables: positive learning relationships (Kerssen-Griep/Hess/Trees 2003), effective mentoring and positive classroom atmosphere (Kerssen-Griep/Trees/Hess 2008), as well as fair and useful feedback (Trees/Kerssen-Griep/Hess 2009). We obtained similar results in an experimental setting using instructional forum interactions: Polite tutors were judged as applying more face work, being more oriented towards the recipient, more credible and more likable (Jucks/Brummernhenrich/Päuler in press). Jessmer and Anderson (2001) found that recipients judged persons who formulated emails in a polite manner as friendlier, more likable and more competent than those who communicated less politely.

In sum, there seem to be two directions of findings: On the one hand there are indications that politeness could hinder effective tutoring due to a loss of clarity and comprehensibility. Note, however, that politeness does not necessarily implicate indirectness (Blum-Kulka 1987) and that politeness theory delineates several different ways to redress FTAs. Moreover, Park (2008) did not find any differences between groups that were instructed to communicate either politely or effectively. On the other hand, there seem to be positive effects of politeness in tutorial settings.

3. Rationale for the Present Study

In the current study, we take a closer look on the effects of politeness in tutoring processes from the recipients' point of view. Hence, our examination focuses on tutors' utterances. While in a previous study, we fabricated forum interactions (Jucks/Brummernhenrich/Päuler in press) to realise the experimental politeness manipulation, we now use utterances taken from a natural setting to ensure ecological validity. However, we reach beyond a mere text corpus analysis and achieve an experimental setting by randomly presenting the materials and systematically varying the manner of face work. Our basic question is: What impact do tutors' moves have on the recipients depending on which politeness strategy they choose? We examine two politeness strategies, derived from Brown and Levinson's theory: *bald/on record* and *negative politeness*. Based on the findings discussed above, we postulate the following hypotheses:

H1 Recipients perceive tutorial moves that are combined with negative politeness as more polite and perceive a higher amount of face work stemming from the tutor.

H1 is consistent with Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory. Note that, since we varied the amount and format of FTA in our materials, this hypothesis also serves as a manipulation check.

Kerssen-Griep/Trees/Hess (2008) found that attentive feedback leads to a greater satisfaction among students concerning their learning relationship with their teachers. We therefore assume that face work, realised here through negative politeness, leads to a better appraisal of the tutor:

H2 The impression of the tutor's communication style is more positive if he applies negative politeness while making the tutorial move.

On the Role of Face-Threatening Acts in Online Tutoring

On the basis of previous studies, which indicated a relation of politeness and perceived competence (Trees/Kerssen-Griep/Hess 2009; Jessmer/Anderson 2001), the following prediction was made:

H3 Credibility is perceived higher if the tutorial move is combined with negative politeness.

The results of Person et al. (1995) lead us to assume:

H4 Comprehensibility is rated higher if the tutorial move is uttered in a bald/on record manner.

In line with Kerssen-Griep/Trees/Hess (2008) and Jessmer/Anderson (2001), we predict the following:

H5 The impression of the tutor's likeability is more positive if he applies negative politeness while making the tutorial move.

3.1. Method

For the present work, verbal data from a previous study in the context of instructional CMC (Brummernhenrich/Jucks 2013) was analysed as to the use of politeness strategies. Passages of the discourses served as stimulus material for the recipient study. The aim was to examine the assessment of the tutors' utterances by the addressees regarding perceived audience design, credibility, comprehensibility, likeability and use of face work.

3.2. Participants

111 persons participated in the online survey. They were recruited in social networks, in university lectures and courses and via mailing lists. They either received course credit or had a 3:1 chance to win a €10 voucher for an internet store. Participants who filled out the survey with interruptions or who needed less than ten minutes were excluded. On average, it took the participants 25.23

minutes ($SD = 12.65$) to complete the survey. Furthermore, participants had to have judged both bald and polite utterances as these were to be compared within subjects. 81 persons remained for further analysis. 59 were female. Age ranged from 18 to 60, mean age was 24.99 ($SD = 7.33$). The participants reported using computers for a mean of 23.62 hours ($SD = 11.02$) a week and spending on average 19.02 hours a week ($SD = 10.52$) using the internet.

Preliminary analyses revealed no significant differences between experimental conditions regarding gender, age, computer or internet use. Therefore, these variables were not analysed any further.

3.3. Materials

For the dialogue sequences to be rated by addressees, we used verbal data from naturalistic online tutoring sessions (Brummernhenrich/Jucks 2013). The learning task of these sessions was to perform a statistical analysis using common software, a typical task in psychology research methods courses. In a one-to-one setting, the tutor, an experienced psychology student, communicated with the tutee, a student with only basic statistical knowledge. Tutor and tutee were situated in different rooms; communication was realised via an instant messenger program and saved as text files afterwards. We content-analysed the tutors' moves, applying a coding scheme by D'Mello/Olney/Person (2010) for tutorial moves and Brown/Levinson's (1987) theory for politeness strategies. For the recipient study, we selected utterances from several tutorial situations that had been coded either bald/on record or with negative politeness and that participants could judge without knowing what was taking place on the tutee's screen and without knowledge about the subject matter. To give context to the tutor's utterance, at least one utterance of the tutee was included. We ended up with a pool of 12 dialogue sequences. The critical utterances to

be rated were pointed out through bold type. An example of the bald/on record condition was “Look at the second table” [Schau dir die zweite Tabelle an]¹, an example of the negative politeness condition was “You might want to look that up again” [Du kannst es ruhig noch mal nachgucken].

3.4. Design

We conducted a 1x2 factorial design with the within-subjects factor politeness strategy (bald/on record or negative politeness). The study was realised as an online survey. Each participant rated three randomly selected dialogue sequences using the scales presented below.

3.5. Dependent measures

Measures were assessed on 5-point Likert scales from 1 (low) to 5 (high), or, when items consisted of bipolar pairs, on a 5-point scale between the respective poles.

Tutor's instructional face work. To measure how polite the tutor seemed to the participant, we used the Revised Instructional Face-Support Scale (RIFS; Kerssen-Griep/Trees/Hess 2008). We adapted the items to measure how the participants perceived the use of positive (4 items) and negative politeness (4 items) by the tutors. Scale consistencies were Cronbach's α values of .85 (positive face work scale) and .80 (negative face work scale).

Tutor's Recipient Orientation. The recipient orientation scale (ROS; Bromme/Jucks/Runde 2005) was used to assess four aspects of the participants' perception of the tutor's communication: (1) the *per-*

¹ The study was conducted in German.

ceived audience design, i.e. the extent to which the tutor tried to take into account a layperson's perspective (10 items), (2) *subjective assessment of one's own comprehension* (5 items), (3) *the tutor's specialised knowledge and commitment to writing on this specific issue* (4 items), and (4) *emotional evaluation* (3 items).

The items were modified so that the tutor was the agent. Not all items could be used in the limited context of our study. We omitted one item of the *audience design* scale, the complete *subjective assessment* scale, one item of the *tutor's knowledge and commitment* scale and one item of the *emotional evaluation* scale. All subscales received satisfactory consistencies with an α value of .88 for perceived audience design and values of at least .78 for the other scales.

Tutor's Credibility. The Credibility Scale (McCroskey/Teven 1999) was designed to assess source credibility on the three scales *competence*, *trustworthiness* and *goodwill*. Each scale consists of six bipolar adjective pairs. Items were translated and instructions were modified using the word "tutor". We omitted three items of the trustworthiness scale which were not suitable for the dialogues. Cronbach's α values were .89 for competence, .90 for goodwill and .81 for trustworthiness.

Social Relation to the tutor. Two items were used to assess the appraisal of the social relation with the tutor: "I find the tutor likable" and "I could imagine to work with this tutor". Cronbach's α was .91.

Comprehensibility of tutor's utterances. We employed a measure originally developed by Langer, Schulz von Thun and Tausch (1993) to rate the comprehensibility of written texts and oral information. Following the example of Clark et al. (2003), we applied the measure for the purpose of assessing our participants' comprehensibility perceptions. The inventory measures four characteristics on bipolar scales: simplicity, structure/order, conciseness,

additional stimulation. We omitted four items which were not suitable for our context. Cronbach's α values were .80 for simplicity (6 items), .80 for structure (4 items), .84 for conciseness (6 items).

4. Results

Preliminary analyses revealed most of our data to be nonnormal. Therefore, Winsorized values were used in the inferential analyses to provide more robust estimators (Erceg-Hurn/Mirosevich 2008) and are also reported here.

In order to evaluate our hypotheses, we calculated repeated measures MANOVAs (for all dependent variables containing more than one subscale) or a repeated measures ANOVA (for the social relation scale) with communication strategy (bald/on record or negative politeness) as within-subject factor. When the multivariate results attained significance, we conducted univariate analyses to ascertain whether the direction of differences for each of the subscales was in line with our hypotheses.

When presenting our results, we define an α level of $p < .05$ as significant. In line with Cohen (1988), we interpreted effect sizes as follows: $\eta_p^2 = .01$ as a small effect, $\eta_p^2 = .06$ as a medium effect, and $\eta_p^2 = .14$ as a large effect. The Winsorized means and standard deviations of all dependent variables in the two conditions are presented in Table 1.

4.1. Hypothesis 1: Perceptions of tutor's instructional face work

H1 posited that negative polite tutoring moves are perceived as containing more face work. The multivariate analyses confirmed

that the experimental manipulation had a large, significant effect on participants' face work ratings, $F(2, 79) = 50.39$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .56$. The univariate tests for the two subscales both attained significance, showing large effects on positive, $F(1, 80) = 48.61$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .38$, and negative face work, $F(1, 80) = 73.91$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .48$. In both cases, polite utterances were rated as containing more face work (positive face work: $M = 3.53$, $SD = 0.48$; negative face work: $M = 3.57$, $SD = 0.45$) than bald ones (positive: $M = 3.17$, $SD = 0.49$; negative: $M = 2.93$, $SD = 0.52$), thus confirming hypothesis 1.

4.2. Hypothesis 2: Perceptions of tutor's communication style

In H2, we assumed that participants would judge the tutor's communication style more positively when reading polite utterances than when reading bald utterances. This hypothesis was partly confirmed.

The multivariate analysis showed a large, significant effect of politeness strategy on the ROS ratings, $F(3, 78) = 6.67$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .20$. The univariate analysis however only showed an effect for the emotional evaluation subscale: Polite utterances were evaluated significantly more positively ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.39$) than bald ones ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 0.41$), $F(1, 80) = 14.89$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .16$, large effect. Contrary to our expectations, there were no significant differences between conditions for either audience design, $F(1, 80) = 0.92$, $p = .34$, or expert's knowledge and commitment, $F(1, 80) = 0.74$, $p = .39$.

4.3. Hypothesis 3: Perceptions of tutor's credibility

We expected that polite utterances would lead to a higher perceived credibility of the tutor. The multivariate analysis with the credibility measures showed a large, significant effect for the ex-

perimental manipulation, $F(3, 78) = 28.26$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .52$. The univariate analyses showed significant effects for two of the subscales: When judging polite utterances, participants assigned more goodwill ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.41$) and more trustworthiness ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 0.31$) to the tutor than from bald utterances (goodwill: $M = 3.43$, $SD = 0.51$, $F(1, 80) = 49.34$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .38$, large effect; trustworthiness: $M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.44$, $F(1, 80) = 10.66$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .12$, medium effect). No significant difference was found for the competence subscale, $F(1, 80) = 1.47$, $p = .23$. Thus, the hypothesis was mostly confirmed.

4.4. Hypothesis 4: Comprehensibility of tutor's utterances

We assumed that polite utterances would lead to a reduced clearness of the content explained. The MANOVA with the comprehensibility subscales confirmed a large, significant effect of the politeness strategy of the utterances, $F(4, 77) = 20.90$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .52$.

However, the results of the univariate analyses were heterogeneous: The politeness of the utterances had no effect on the perception of their simplicity, $F(1, 80) = 1.40$, $p = .24$, or structure, $F(1, 80) = 1.43$, $p = .24$. However, the other two subscales reached significance, showing large effects for the experimental manipulation, albeit in opposite directions: Polite utterances were judged as more stimulating ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.64$) but less concise ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 0.26$) than bald utterances (additional stimulation: $M = 3.02$, $SD = 0.82$, $F(1, 80) = 39.97$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .33$; conciseness: $M = 3.79$, $SD = 0.29$, $F(1, 80) = 28.75$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .26$).

4.5. Hypothesis 5: Social relation to the tutor

The type of politeness strategy in the utterances had a large effect on the participant's judgments concerning their social relation to the tutor, $F(1, 80) = 45.11$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .36$: In line with hypothesis 5, participants reading polite utterances judged the tutor as significantly more likable ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 0.56$) than when reading bald utterances ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 0.59$).

	Experimental condition			
	Negative politeness		Bald/on record	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Revised Instructional Face-Support Scale</i>				
Positive face work	3.53	0.48	3.17	0.49
Negative face work	3.58	0.35	2.99	0.37
<i>Recipient Orientation Scale</i>				
Audience design	3.61	0.32	3.56	0.41
Tutor's knowledge and commitment	3.54	0.35	3.49	0.40
Emotional evaluation	3.63	0.39	3.42	0.41
<i>Credibility Scales</i>				
Competence	3.85	0.32	3.91	0.38
Trustworthiness	3.91	0.31	3.75	0.44
Goodwill	3.89	0.41	3.43	0.51
<i>Comprehensibility Inventory</i>				
Simplicity	3.90	0.33	3.83	0.43
Structure	3.71	0.39	3.64	0.50
Conciseness	3.57	0.26	3.79	0.29
Additional Stimulation	3.75	0.64	3.02	0.82
<i>Likeability</i>	3.79	0.56	3.20	0.59

Table 1: Winsorized Means and Standard Deviations of the Dependent Variables in the Two Experimental Conditions

5. Discussion

The current study examined the effect of tutors' politeness on the perception of recipients in online communication. Recipients received either tutorial moves uttered bald/on record or redressed using negative politeness. They evaluated the utterances with respect to perceived face work, communication style, credibility, comprehensibility and likeability.

The results concerning the first hypothesis showed that the manipulation was successful: When tutors employed negative politeness, they were perceived as providing more face work than in the bald/on record condition. Participants however did not differentiate between positive and negative face work. Both aspects were rated higher in the polite condition. While the RIFS was originally designed for face-to-face situations, for participants who themselves were the addressees of face work and who had a greater social distance to their teacher than was the case in our peer-tutoring situation (Kerssen-Griep/Trees/Hess 2008; Kerssen-Griep/Hess/Trees 2003; Trees/Kerssen-Griep/Hess 2009), it was shown to be applicable in settings like ours. Regarding recipient orientation, only the emotional evaluation subscale revealed significant differences. This could be attributed to the shortness of dialogue sequences that made it difficult to process these aspects properly. In our previous study, using whole discourses rather than single utterances, we also found differences for the audience design scale but no effect for the commitment scale (Jucks/Brummernhenrich/Päuler in press).

We found large effects for the Credibility Scale's subscales goodwill and trustworthiness, being, as predicted, rated higher when uttered politely. Our findings are in line with those of Witt and Kerssen-Griep (2011), who found that students perceived instructors as more credible when they employed face-threat mitigation.

Contrary to previous results (Jessmer/Anderson 2001), there were no differences for the competence subscale. We similarly did not find an effect of politeness on perceived competence in our previous study (Jucks/Brummernhenrich/Päuler in press). In both cases participants were unfamiliar with the subject matter and thus could have been unable to judge this dimension. Two subscales of the comprehensibility inventory revealed significant differences: conciseness and additional stimulation. Conciseness was rated higher for bald utterances. Unfortunately, the dialogue sequences containing the utterances to be rated differed in length between conditions. Thus, this result might merely reflect that fact, even though participants were reminded to assess only a single utterance which we highlighted in the text. Additional stimulation was considered higher for the negative politeness condition; this could be ascribed to the same reason. Alternatively, politeness might have had a stimulating effect on recipients, which would be interesting to investigate further. As expected, politeness had a positive effect on perceptions of the tutors' likeability.

6. Limitations and Future Research

In the current study, we investigated only a restricted range of politeness strategies. To generalise findings, future research should extend its scope to adequately assess the role of politeness in tutoring. Positive politeness as well as the fact that utterances can contain more than one politeness strategy at once should be taken into account. Additionally, the sociological variables *social distance* and *relative power*, as postulated by Brown/Levinson (1987), could be varied.

In our study, we did not account for the influence of the tutees' communicative behaviour on the tutors' utterances. The discursive

nature of politeness in tutoring could be an interesting topic for future research.

The results concerning comprehensibility differed from our expectations. It could be argued that the usage of the comprehensibility inventory was not suited to our setting. We had to leave out or modify several items and did not test the new version.

This research focused on tutoring in a chat context. Comparisons of tutors' choice of politeness strategies in different media settings could be illuminating as it has been in other contexts (Duthler 2006).

While the findings of our study are in line with previous research and indicate mostly positive effects of politeness, the literature showing detrimental effects on clarity and explicitness cannot be discounted. A key task for future research in this field will be to find communicative strategies that allow tutors to create a motivating atmosphere without jeopardising the learning outcome.

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“Hofnarr” and “Bürgerschreck” vs. “kamir-batir” and “barakobamas”: Face Work Strategies and Stylising in Russian and German Online Discussion Forums

1. Introduction

The politeness paradigm established by Brown/Levinson (1978; 1987) was developed according to oral language, which can be gathered from their examples. A second premise, which Brown/Levinson made even more explicit by their title, is their claim of their concept's universal validity. This contribution calls both points, the focus on oral communication and the claim of universality, into question through the analysis of a corpus of apparently written language in a certain medium, with a focus on interlingual and intercultural comparison.

As the discussion on whether the language of the internet is some kind of “conceptual orality” (“konzeptionelle Mündlichkeit,” Koch/Oesterreicher 2008: 200ff.; Thimm 2000: 10) or a new kind of writing (“neue Schriftlichkeit,” Androutsopoulos 2007) seems to be still in abeyance, and as the applicability of the face concept can

be assumed in this context, I will leave this debate aside.¹ However, the second predisposition, regarding the question of whether the face paradigm is universal or culturally biased, is of interest to this contribution and has been widely discussed within the scientific community. Wierzbicka (1985) emphasised the predominance of the negative face wants in Brown/Levinson's concept, which is, in her opinion, an Anglo-Saxon bias:

It is English which seems to have developed a particularly rich system of devices reflecting a characteristically Anglo-Saxon cultural tradition: a tradition which places special emphasis on the rights and on the autonomy of every individual, which abhors interference in other people's affairs [...], which is tolerant of individual idiosyncrasies and peculiarities, which respects everyone's privacy, which approves of compromises and disapproves of dogmatism of any kind (Wierzbicka 1985: 150).

Wierzbicka and Rathmayr (1996) question the importance of negative face in Slavic (especially Polish and Russian) culture and emphasise the dominance of speech acts along the positive politeness scale. The claim to universality is also doubted by linguists from Japan and other Asian cultures (cf. e.g. Matsumoto 1988). More important to my project – a comparison of Russian and German politeness strategies – is the partial withdrawal from the rejection of the negative politeness pole for Slavic languages, first suggested by Zemskaia (1997: 274) and empirically shown by Ogiermann (2009). Ogiermann demonstrates that the use of imperative forms, often taken as an indication of positive politeness in Russian and Polish culture, is not as common as assumed and other forms such as questions and hedges, clearly coming from the negative paradigm, are used as well, although the fre-

¹ For the applicability of Brown/Levinson's conception on computer-mediated communication cf. e.g. Upadhyayh 2010 and other articles in the *Journal of Politeness Research* 6 (1), 2010.

quency of direct, positive polite behaviour is higher than in English or German (Ogiermann 2009: 198).

Culturally differing preferences in realising certain speech acts undoubtedly exist, as shown by the works in the field of cross-cultural pragmatics (e.g. Blum-Kulka 1987; House/Kasper 1987; House 1989). Moreover, there might be a culture-specific preference for positive or negative politeness (O'Driscoll 1996: 4; Kreß 2010: 160ff.) and other factors influencing the choice of a face-saving strategy, such as age, gender or simply individual preferences, should not be neglected. However, this does not question the underlying concept of face wants and the reciprocal want of face-saving as a cause and explanation for verbal politeness.

2. Online discussion forums/online communities

This contribution focuses on the online discussion forums² of selected major Russian and German online journals. Three of them (ZEIT, Spiegel, Коммерсантъ) have a print version as well. They all offer the possibility to comment on articles and to discuss with other readers in forums, so the debates are a form of connected communication ("Anschlusskommunikation") which can only be fully understood when the content of the related article is known. One has to be registered to leave a comment and take part in the discussion. For participation on *spiegel.de* a username, real name and email address are needed (postal address and date of birth are optional); for *zeit.de* a username and email address is sufficient. To take part in the discussions on *gazeta.ru* one has to be a registered

² For a short overview of the history of online forums cf. Maaß 2012: 75.

member of *Facebook* or the Russian social network *Вконтакте* (“in contact”). *Gazeta.ru* requires registration in *Живой Журнал* (Live-Journal), a social network platform for blogs and online diaries.

The influence of the editors is handled differently in the four forums. *Spiegel.de* influences the discussions through a moderator who makes comments, often a pointed summary of the article, apparently with the purpose of initiating a debate or provoking the readers. *Zeit.de* removes comments, shortens contributions or comments on them (“Bitte bemühen Sie sich um mehr Sachlichkeit. Danke. Die Redaktion/sc” – “Please try to be more objective. Thanks. The editors” (comment no. 2, *Zeit.de* 2011a)). On *gazeta.ru* and *Коммерсантъ* such intervening moderation cannot be observed, but according to the site guidelines the administrators delete comments with commercial features, as well as those that contradict moral norms or insult other users (cf. *Gazeta.ru* n.d.).

Online forums are here understood as an online community in the sense of Ebersbach/Glaser/Heigl (2011: 195): a community of persons who gather for a while on a site in the internet, are bound there for a definite time and leave some traces there.³

3. Computer-mediated communication and face work

The language of online communication is fairly well described (cf. e.g. Thimm 2000; Beißwenger 2001; Androutsopoulos 2007) and the applicability of the politeness paradigm has been shown in articles in the *Journal of Politeness Research* 6 (1), 2010. Therefore I

³ “eine Gemeinschaft von Menschen verstanden, die sich um eine Seite im Internet scharen, sich eine gewisse Zeit an diese binden und dort auch Spuren hinterlassen”.

want to highlight just a few features that seem to be of special interest in this context.

First, nonverbal behaviour does not play a role in the initial concept of Brown/Levinson. Without doubt para-verbal signals, mimicry and proxemics can be decisive for a polite or impolite performance. Similarly, in computer-mediated communication (CMC), nonverbal signs play a special role, but they have to be made explicit and they have to be translated into other signals in this non face-to-face situation. Krämer (2000: 47) even points out that to participate in CMC, a user has to become a symbolic expression himself. This is one part of the depersonalisation, dramatisation and staginess that is often described as a key characteristic of online communication (Krämer 2000: 47f.; Döring 1999). Emotions, attitudes and other “meta” information, usually enunciated by facial expressions, are made explicit by emoticons or, at least in German CMC, by inflectives (“seufz”). According to Maaß (2012: 82), emoticons and other para-verbal signals play an important role in CMC in general, but especially in managing face threats and aggression. The communicator himself is symbolised by his username, his profile and eventually by a picture, which can be seen as his avatar (cf. Kreß 2011). As a result of this “translational work” nonverbal signs take on an importance which seems to be much higher than in face-to-face interaction: In face-to-face interaction, nonverbal signs can also be interpreted as accidental, whereas in CMC they have to be understood as intentional. Thus they play a key role in the self-presentation⁴ of the interlocutors and can be part of the relational work⁵ in CMC.

⁴ For the linguistic concept of self-presentation and stylisation, cf. Spiegel 1997; Selting 1997.

⁵ For the concept of relational work as an enhancement of the politeness concept cf. e.g. Locher/Watts 2005; Locher/Watts 2008.

4. (Im-)Politeness strategies and relational work in online forums (German/Russian)

Proceeding from the fact that debates in online forums are not orientated towards a consensus, but rather are based on conflicting opinions⁶ on which the interactors work in their comments, this study focuses on face-threatening and face-saving acts, which are used to verbalise the contradicting positions, to define them and eventually to establish consensus.

Speech acts of contradiction and dissent are characteristic of verbal conflicts. According to Brown/Levinson (1987: 66), expressing contradiction or disagreement is a threat to the addressee's positive face, as the speaker/writer "indicates that he thinks H [the Hearer] is wrong or misguided or unreasonable about some issue, such wrongness being associated with disapproval" (ibid.). In Brown/Levinson' conception, polite verbal behaviour would consist of compensating actions such as an excuse, a compliment, etc., intended to reduce the face threat. The notion of politeness itself has an evaluative nuance, and it could imply that an absence of such redressive actions has to be qualified as impolite. It may be doubted that this also counts for conflictive interactions, which are conducted under differing premises: Here the absence of politeness (which is not the same as impoliteness) is not only possible, but sometimes even appropriate (cf. Krefß 2010: 174f.). Therefore, I refer to the concept of "relational work" which allows the consideration of the whole spectrum, from verbal politeness and the absence of politeness to impoliteness, and focuses on the range of "relational messages" which are expressed "by the way" or explicitly and which indicate for the interlocutors how they see their relationship:

⁶ My considerations are based on the definition of conflict in Krefß 2010: 51.

Looked at in this way, relational work comprises the entire continuum of verbal behaviour from direct, impolite, rude or aggressive interaction through to polite interaction, encompassing both appropriate and inappropriate forms of social behaviour (Locher 2004: 51). Impolite behaviour is thus just as significant in defining relationships as appropriate/polite or polite behaviour. In this sense relational work can be understood as equivalent to Halliday's (1978) interpersonal level of communication, in which interpersonal rather than ideational meaning is negotiated (Locher/Watts 2005: 11).

This study analysed comments that appeared under the categories "Самое обсуждаемое" ("Most discussed", *gazeta.ru*), "Самое обсуждаемое. Рейтинг за последние трое суток" ("Most discussed. Rating of the last three days"), "Meistkommentiert" ("Most commented", *zeit.de*) and "Meistgelesene Themen" and "Meistdiskutierte Themen" ("Most read topics" and "most discussed topics", *spiegel.de*⁷).

First, it is notable that the quantity and the presentation of the comments differ. Whereas in the Russian forums a highly rated article might have between 150 and 200 comments, the most commented articles on *zeit.de* have between 200 and 300 comments. In the Russian forums users often leave a comment via Facebook or Twitter without text or topic, simply to express sympathy and agreement with a longer comment. The relationship between a comment and a posted agreement or answer is made explicit by the graphic layout of the site. On *zeit.de* the reference is made clear by a specific rubric "Antwort auf" ("answer to"), allowing one

⁷ The last category, "most discussed topics" differs a little bit from the others, as it includes some "top topics", where an article is discussed, as well as questions from the editors, which can be discussed by the readers (e.g. "Euro – kann Griechenland in der Währungsunion bleiben?"/"The Euro – can Greece stay in the monetary union?" (Spiegel Online 2011a).

to see the reactions to this comment. On *spiegel.de* the related comment is shown in italics as a “Zitat von” (“quote from”).

4.1. Self-presentation in online forums

One comparatively noticeable difference between the Russian and the German forum users might seem at first sight rather peripheral to the focus of this contribution examining the relational work in online discussions. However, it is a peculiarity of online communication as mentioned above: The usernames, understood as symbolic expressions of the users themselves – as a kind self-presentation or self-stylisation – bring a measure of meaning, a communicative offer in advance. It is somehow a form of meta-comment or meta-information, a bracket to the actual comment, which might help the reader to interpret the statement and/or to classify it. This potential of usernames is widely exploited by the German participants, among whom we can find aptronyms like “DIELOGE” (“THELODGE”, cf. comment no. 275 on *Zeit.de* 2012b), “autopilot” (cf. comment no. 274 on *Zeit.de* 2012b), “LibertyOnly” (cf. comment no. 17 on *Spiegel Online* 2012), “Freiheitsfreund” (“friend of freedom”, cf. comment no. 277 on *Zeit.de* 2012b), “Hofnarr” (“jester”, cf. comment no. 5 on *Zeit.de* 2011b), “Bürgerschreck” (“terror of the middle classes”, cf. comment no. 2 on *Spiegel Online* 2011b) and “Duelist” (cf. *Zeit.de* 2011b). Whereas the first three names give some kind of general information – maybe about the user’s political preference – the names “Hofnarr”, “Bürgerschreck” and “Duelist” are of higher interest in this context, as they deliver meta-communicative information in the narrower sense: Whereas a “Hofnarr” claims that he should not be taken too seriously, the “duelist” and the “terror of the middle classes” send the message that we can expect rather conflictive communication. When such messages are sent through

nicknames, they can be seen as some kind of relational work in advance.

Although the Russian users also show a high amount of creativity in their choice of nicknames, their self-presentation is usually orientated toward general aspects of their identity with no special reference to their thinking or communicating. Many of them use their name or an abbreviation of their name, sometimes in combination with numbers. Then there are names like “Chesnok” (“garlic”, cf. Gazeta.ru 2012), which ensure anonymity and maybe hint towards a culinary preference, and “kamir-batir” (a boy made from dough in a Bashkir fairy tale, cf. Gazeta.ru 2012), which might refer to the user’s ethnic roots. However, the use of a real name, often even one’s given first name and surname, is standard, while such stylisations as “naughty lamer” (cf. Kommersant.ru 2012), “barakobamas” (cf. Gazeta.ru 2012) and, interestingly enough, the German nickname “ge-walt” (“vio-lence”, cf. Kommersant.ru 2012) are an exceptional case.

4.2. Relational work: Redressive actions

At first glance the discussions in the online forums do not seem to be the place for politeness – bluntness on point (“bald on record” Brown/Levinson 1987: 94ff.) seems to be more appropriate. This coincides with the phenomenon known as trolling,⁸ which is much more extreme online in comparison to a verbal behaviour without redressive actions. Trolling refers to posts with inflammatory or insulting content, which are posted in the security of an anonymous internet. It is interesting, however, that in the German forums, posts that directly respond to another comment and contradict it are often connected with the use of humor.

⁸ Cf. the contribution of Kluge in this volume.

Brown/Levinson (1987: 124) define humor as a strategy of positive politeness:

Since jokes are based on mutual shared background knowledge and values, jokes may be used to stress that shared background or those shared values. Joking is a basic positive-politeness technique, for putting H [the Hearer] at ease.

Humor is used to establish a good relationship, but even more important to my context, it is also used to mitigate a face threat in form of criticism or the like (humor hedging, cf. Locher 2006: 146).

A good example where this strategy is used – to some extent with the purpose of reducing the face threat – is the following, where, in a discussion about vegetarianism, a user responds “seriously” to a statement that a vegetarian lifestyle preserves animals’ rights:

Ich bin dabei, öffnen wir den Grundrechtekatalog des Grundgesetzes endlich auch für Tiere, Recht auf körperliche Unversehrtheit, Religions-, Versammlungs- und Meinungsfreiheit. Und Aufsichtsräte sollten künftig zumindest zu einem Drittel mit “hohen Tieren” besetzt werden.

Aber was machen wir mit Tieren die einfach Tiere essen, z.B. mit Vögeln, die Insekten fangen, um damit ihre Jungen zu ernähren? Oder mit Löwen die wehrlose Gazellen killen? Und was ist mit Aasgeiern, die die Totenruhe stören?

Da sind noch viele Fragen offen.

Im Ernst: Echter Tierschutz in der Massentierhaltung (keine Legebatterien etc.), da bin ich sofort dabei.

Aber staatlich verordnetes Veganertum? Ich sage ja zum Schnitzel. (comment no. 2 on Zeit.de 2011a)

I'm with you, let's open the charter of fundamental rights for animals at last, the right to physical integrity, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, freedom of opinion.

And in all advisory boards should at least on third be appointed with “high animals” [“big shots”].

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But what shall we do with animals which simply eat animals, e.g. birds that catch insects to feed their young? Or with lions that kill defenseless gazelles? Or with vultures who disturb the peace of the dead? There are many open questions.

Seriously: Real animal welfare in factory farming (no battery farms etc.) – I'm absolutely with you.

But state-ordered veganism? I say yes to Schnitzel.

With this exaggeration, the user wants to show that the opposing standpoint makes no sense in final consequence. This would constitute an open face-threat. However, there are certain verbal instruments that reduce the offence: The contribution starts with seeming agreement ("I'm with you"); the play on words ("high animals") and the rather absurd pictures (vultures disturbing the peace of the dead) make the opposition less sharp. After a meta-communicative announcement to leave the humorous mode ("Seriously") the user expresses partial agreement. And even after the step into a more serious mode, humor is again used: "I say yes to Schnitzel" sounds like a political slogan which in combination with such a mundane thing as a Schnitzel is rather ridiculous. This means that the user takes themselves not too seriously – a tribute to the addressee's face, which seems to function like the tact maxim as described by Leech (1983: 104ff.) where cost and benefit have to be kept in equilibrium.

A second example works with a humorous distance from the self as well. Here a caricature, published on the website of an Austrian politician, is discussed with respect to its anti-Semitic content. A fat bigwig with a hooked nose eats greedily while a poor, skinny man (standing for the people) can only nibble on a bone:

Ich habe meine Brille mehrmals geputzt, genau hingeschaut, auch des öfteren geblinzelt. Es tut mir nach intensiven Studium des Bildes in der Folge jedoch sehr Leid, Ihnen mitteilen zu müssen, dass die Anatomie der Nase "des Volkes" zwar ästhetisch nicht

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ansprechend, jedoch in keinem Falle eine "Hakennase" ist.
(comment no. 10 on Zeit.de 2012a)

I cleaned my glasses several times, I had a close look, I blinked many a time. However, I am very sorry that after an intense study of the picture I have to inform you that, while the anatomy of "the people's" nose is not esthetically pleasing, it is by no means a "hooked nose."

The post is related to a statement in which a user claimed that the caricature cannot be anti-Semitic because the other person in the picture has a hooked nose as well. In this example the distancing and therefore slightly soothing character of the humor is more overt than in the first excerpt. The author makes fun of himself by drawing a rather ridiculous picture of him looking closely at the caricature. Furthermore he admits the "not esthetically pleasing" character of the nose in question and thus serves the positive face of the addressee. Of course the disapproval of the contradicting position is clear as well.

But humor is a two-edged sword: it can also be a weapon, and the downgrading character is almost lost – a fact that becomes clear when irony comes up. Obviously irony plays a role in the first two examples, but one final German example shows that when irony is solely applied to the addressee's face it is clearly face-threatening.

Danke, großer "Check"! Bin immer dankbar, von Gelehrten freundlich und doch bestimmt weitergebildet zu werden. Daß das Problemchen auch "ganz simpel" zu checken ist, befriedet mich noch mehr. (comment no. 95 on Spiegel Online 2011b)

Thank you, great "checker"! I'm always grateful to get a friendly but thoroughly resolute instruction from a scholar. That this little problem can be checked so simplistically makes me even more satisfied.

Here the author shows themselves to be "enthusiastic" about an explanation of the German electoral system that the addressee had provided for all the "Nonchecks" (German slang). The irony is applied on the addressee exclusively: The problem is not as simple

as they think, and it is clear by the use of slang words in their post and its content that he is not from an academic background and their post cannot be called friendly. Irony is here used to increase the threat of an opposing standpoint, an “aggressive use of face-work” (Goffman 1967: 24ff.).

In the Russian forums, such a use of irony to soften or strengthen the face-threat can scarcely be observed. One of the few examples comes from a discussion about an article on Julian Assange, and is addressed directly to the author of the article:

Автор совершил географическое открытие: Мальвинские острова. Видимо, ему надоели Мальдивские острова. Надо вычитывать свои тексты! (Gazeta.ru 2012)

The author has made a geographic discovery: The Malvian Islands. Probably he's fed up with the Maldiv Islands. One has to proofread one's own texts.

Although the user starts humorously, he ends with a serious admonition. This corresponds with the more sincere tone of the Russian posts in general. A tendency to limit the use of humor only to the original author of an article is confirmed by a second post:

Автор у нас Капитан Очевидность. Ну или эстонец (Gazeta.ru 2012)

Our author is Captain Obvious. Or he's simply Estonian

Here the author of the related article is characterised as not very inventive or witty, as everything he wrote is self-evident. This criticism is “wrapped up” in a kind of nickname/mock name which stands for an internet character: *Капитан Очевидность*/ *Captain Obvious*, an ostensible superhero who reveals the truth on the internet – the truth that has been already obvious to everybody (cf. Lurkmore.to n.d.). And the Estonian is a popular butt of Russian jokes (cf. e.g. Anekdoti.ru n.d.). In both cases the original author is the object of jokes in a face-threatening manner.

4.3. Relational work: Without redressive actions

The Russian posts are often characterised by rather direct, face-threatening expressions of opposition. In these cases, the positions are stated without any kind of redressive actions, as in the following example:

Статья совершенно не о чем. Все с ног на голову перевернуто. У кого-нибудь есть сомнения в независимости шведского суда? У меня лично нет. Шансы, что Швеция выдаст Ассанжа стремятся к нулю. Ассанж, к которому я, кстати, с симпатией отношусь, по-моему действительно нашкодил. Хотя дело, конечно, непростое.

Но вот сомнения в независимости названного суда огромны, именно из-за них Ассанж требует гарантий, а Эквадор дал убежище. (Gazeta.ru 2012)

This article is about nothing. Everything is turned upside down. Does anybody doubt the independence of the Swedish court? I personally don't. The chances that Sweden extradites Assange are close to zero. Assange, who I, by the way, find likeable, has caused some damage. However, the case is complicated.

The independence of the court in question has to be deeply doubted though, which is why Assange demands a guarantee and Ecuador gave refuge.

Whereas the initial post has certain downgrading devices, which limit the poster's own position ("Assange, who I, by the way, find likeable", "the case is complicated"), the response expresses direct opposition ("Does anybody doubt" → "has to be deeply doubted though").

Furthermore, an aggressive use of face work can be observed in many cases on the Russian forums. This includes not only direct contradiction,⁹ but also exposing and insulting the opponent. This is done by a total rejection of a position by declaring it as nonsense

⁹ In the Russian debates direct addressing is rather common, here it outweighs the talking about a present third party, as Maaß 2012 describes it for German forums.

through the use of slang and a pejorative lexis. The first example comes from an article about the elections for a new governor of St. Petersburg:

зато вас, максим, как обычно очень обильно и бессмысленно)¹⁰
(Kommersant.ru 2011)

However, this is as usual from you, Maksim, wordy and pointless)

This is an open face-threat through the evaluation of an opinion as pointless, but the affront is intensified by the use of the proper name; it is a personalised insult, only slightly weakened by a smiling emoticon at the end of the post.

A tendency to insult opponents personally can be seen especially in the hot discussions where very high numbers of comments are reached. One such topic is the “Pussy Riot” case, and an interview with a well-known Russian musician, songwriter and poet, Andrey Makarevich, who says that he is ashamed of his country because of the judgment in this court case. The following examples are taken from posts regarding this interview.

The first example comes along with an open insult through an invective. It is a reaction to a statement where the author points out that the Russian church (which played a rather poor role in this case) by nature should be merciful and not be interested in a personal boost for the patriarch:

Церковь это община, олух. (Kommersant.ru 2012)

The church is the congregation, blockhead.

The use of abusive, vulgar language is rather frequent in heated debates, not only concerning the opponent, but also the object of the controversy, perhaps to express a general irritability concerning the discussion. Another example from this thread, related to the same statement, is:

¹⁰ On the Russian internet one or more single brackets are used as emoticons.

Нет милости, об том и спич. Есть лишь срань. (Kommersant.ru 2012)

There is no mercy, that's what they're talking about. There is just bullshit.

Already the lexeme *снуч* (from Engl. *speech*) is colloquial, but *срань* is from the vulgar language variety.

The intentional argumentation *ad hominem*, and therefore an argumentation with face-threatening – if not face-destroying – can be observed as well. The musician Makarevich is characterised as a greedy Jew who uses this interview for self-promotional purposes. This is rebutted immediately:

Макаревичем согласен в последнем ответе, что PR проект удался, они будут грести большие деньги, еврей уже все заработал... Стыдно Вам давно уже должно быть МАкароныч! Все, что заработал Макаревич, он заработал своим талантом, а про вас, как было сказано выше, вряд ли кто-нибудь-когда-нибудь услышит. Кстати, вы знаете, что у вас имя еврейское)) (Kommersant.ru 2012)

I agree with Makarevich's last answer, the PR venture succeeded, they will shovel more money, this Jew has earned already enough... You should be ashamed of Makarevich for a long time!

Everything Makarevich has earned he has earned through his talent, and about you, as already mentioned above, hardly anyone has ever heard anything. By the way, did you know that you have a Jewish name))

The superfluous and inappropriate hint to an ethnic background, which has nothing to do with the discussed object and is simply mentioned to destroy someone's face,¹¹ is immediately returned, only slightly mitigated by an emoticon. Although there are some discussions where the users get more direct in the German forums as well, personal insults of that kind cannot be found there, which might be due to a rigid policy on the part of the editors, who delete all content of that kind. It is interesting, though, that the last

¹¹ About *ad hominem* arguments cf. Walton 1998.

posts clearly contradict the policy of the Russian forums as well (as mentioned above) but are not deleted.

5. Conclusion

After a qualitative study of Russian and German online forums, one can assume that a more direct, blunt style (bald on record) is appropriate in the Russian debates. However, as this study has not been quantitative or longitudinal, these results are by no means representative and should be reinforced by statistically reliable arguments. However, the more straightforward and sharp communicative style in the Russian forums shows some parallels with the suggested preference for the positive politeness pole in Russian culture.¹²

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¹² A second hint to this assumption is the tendency to approval "by whole heart" in the Russian debates, which could not be illustrated in this contribution due to limited space.

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